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## NASA astronauts return home after major delay



Butch Wilmore; Suni Williams Joe Raedle.

On March 14, a journey that was originally supposed to be a little over a week but was stretched out to nine months began to come to an end. NASA astronauts Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore were selected for the first crewed test flight on Boeing's Starliner and were only supposed to stay at the International Space Station for 10 days, but when NASA discovered several helium leaks and propulsion system issues on the spacecraft, the agency decided to send it back empty until another mission could be sent up to get the astronauts.

This isn't like some low-gravity version of "The Terminal," in which travelers are stuck in limbo due to some administrative glitch. Space can have devastating and profound health effects on astronauts, which means Williams and Wilmore's extended stay on the ISS could result in pronounced impacts on their bodies.

Launching into space requires undergoing g-force more than double that of what we experience on Earth, which former NASA astronaut Dr. Sandy Magnus once described as feeling like having a "70-pound gorilla sitting on your chest." But that's the last of gravity astronauts feel before reentering the Earth's atmosphere once their mission is complete, and once they enter orbit they will spend the rest of their time in space floating in their seats.

But the effects of gravity or lack thereof are just the beginning of how space manipulates the human body. Everything from worsening eyesight to genetic changes to skin rashes that develop upon arrival even no longer feeling accustomed to the touch of fabric on one's clothes have been reported in people who have gone to space.

"In general, the environment in space causes an accelerated model for disease,

and what we kind of say is an accelerated model for aging," said Dr. AfshinBeheshti, director of the Center for Space Biomedicine at the University of Pittsburgh. "But you don't age faster, it's just that all of the things associated with aging, like cardiovascular risk or cognitive issues ... Everything is kind of sped up in space because of that environment."

Recently, four astronauts took off to the ISS, where the spacecraft will pick up Williams and Wilmore before returning home. At this point, Williams and Wilmore have been in space for nine months, joining just eight other astronauts who have spent more than 200 days in space. (NASA astronaut Frank Rubio holds the record at 371 days.) From what we know about the impacts of space on health, it will take them some time to recover from the journey.

"When we get back, even to lift a pencil we will feel the weight," Wilmore said in a CNN interview last month. "That's the transition back."

That's in part because on Earth, the force of gravity constantly acts on the skeleton, which stimulates bone-building cells called osteoblasts that maintain our bone density. Without that force, bone density and muscles can atrophy and weaken, with bones becoming 1% less dense for every month spent in space without any measures performed to combat bone loss.

Although Williams and Wilmore exercise daily to mitigate these effects, they will still likely have experienced significant bone density loss when they get back. Upon landing, Wilmore and Williams will be met with medical teams who can help them get started on a 45-day post-mission recovery program, said NASA's Lead Flight Surgeon Dr. Stevan Gilmore.

"They work closely with trainers, dedicating two hours each day to return to their pre-flight baseline state of health and fitness," Gilmore wrote to Salon in an email. "Generally, most crewmembers' physiological systems recover within this timeframe."

For comparison, after NASA astronaut Scott Kelly spent one year in space, he had to learn how to walk again, Beheshti said.





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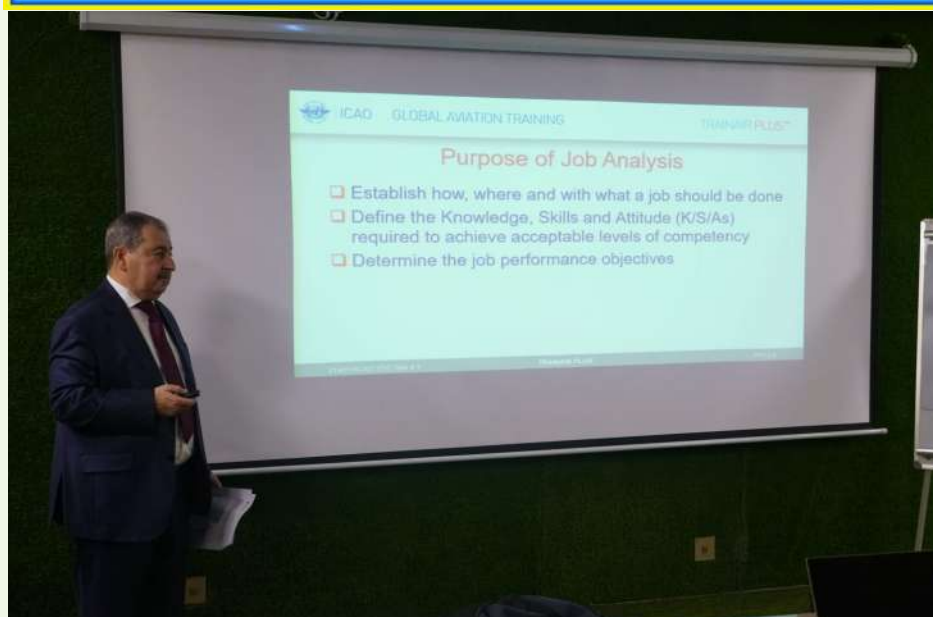
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## ICAO conducts "Training Developers Course" at CATI, Hyderabad

Another ICAO course was recently conducted at CATI Hyderabad, Pakistan, the second in a series aimed at training the officers. Titled "Training Developers Course (TDC)," it spanned two weeks and was led by ICAO instructor Abdel Kader Abu Salim, who traveled from Jordan. The course focused on developing Standardized Training Packages (STPs) and was attended by 10 officers from Pakistan Airports Authority and one from Fly Jinnah. Notably, the instructor returned to CATI after 33 years, having last visited in 1992.



CAA: ICAO Training Developers Course (TDC) concludes at CATI Hyderabad, marking the instructor's return after 33 years.





## **PAA & CAA participate in ICAO Asia Pacific Aerodrome Design and operations Task Force meeting**

A delegation from the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) and Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) actively participated in the Sixth Meeting of the Asia/Pacific Aerodrome Design and Operations Task Force (AP-ADO/TF/6) recently held in Langkawi, Malaysia. The meeting, organized under the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), brought together 76 delegates from 16 member states, along with international aviation organizations.

Key discussions centered on airport infrastructure planning, aerodrome safety enhancements, and the implementation of ICAO Annex 14 Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs). Participants exchanged knowledge on regulatory compliance, risk assessment strategies, and alternative means of compliance for national aerodrome regulations.

Additionally, the delegation attended a guided tour of Langkawi International Airport, gaining firsthand insight into its modern infrastructure and operational

strategies.

Representatives of PAA and CAA reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to aligning with ICAO standards to ensure safer, more efficient, and sustainable airport operations. This participation reflects Pakistan's proactive role in shaping future aerodrome management and regulatory frameworks in the Asia-Pacific region.

The next round of meeting is scheduled for early 2026, continuing the focus on strengthening aerodrome operational excellence across the region.

### **PC approves second attempt to sell PIA**

The Privatisation Commission on Tuesday 18 March recommended to the Cabinet Committee on Privatisation transaction structure for the second attempt of Pakistan International Airlines Company Ltd (PIACL) based on divestment of 51 to 100 per cent shares capital of the national

flag carrier.

The proposed divestment will be together with the management control of the airline as well. The final terms and conditions for the transfer and acquisition of equity stake will be finalised during the course of bidding process and set out in the bid documents for approval by the Cabinet Committee on Privatisation.

The approval of PIACL transaction structure was given at a meeting of Privatisation Commission Board, chaired by newly appointed Adviser to the Prime Minister on Privatisation Muhammad Ali.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has expedited the privatisation process of PIA, advancing its closure to June instead of previously planned October timeline.

The first attempt of privatisation made in October last year failed when the sole bidder offered Rs10 billion, which was far below the minimum expectations of Rs85bn fixed by the Privatisation Commission.

The board also discussed the transaction structure options for privatising Roosevelt Hotel Corporation, New York, and decided to have a briefing with the financial adviser before making any decision.

Privatisation of PIACL and the Roosevelt Hotel are on top of the government's agenda for 2025.



## New batch of Air Traffic Controller completes training at CATI, Hyderabad

A batch of newly recruited Air Traffic Controllers has successfully completed the 44th Basic ATCO Course at the Civil Aviation Training Institute (CATI). This group consisted of 29 officers who underwent an intensive 40-week ab-initio training program, a prerequisite before their formal induction as Assistant Directors Air Traffic Services.

Upon passing out from CATI, these young officers have now been assigned to Karachi and Lahore for On-the-Job Training (OJT), which is essential before they take on independent responsibilities as Air Traffic Controllers.

The training was conducted by a team of experienced former ATC officers, including Mr. Rashid Muhammad Hussain, Mr. Shabbir Ahmed, Mr. Javed Hameed, and Mr. Naveed Ahmed Khan. Their expertise played a vital role in shaping the new generation of ATCOs.



Mr. Sumair Saeed Director CATI giving a certificate to newly trained ATCO.



## PIA to resume flights to Chitral after three years

Pakistan International Airlines will resume its flights to Chitral from Islamabad from April 5 initially on a weekly basis after a gap of about three years.

An official at the PIA's district sales office told media that the ATR-72 flight would land at Chitral airport at 10am on April 5 and depart back for Islamabad after two hours.

The people of Chitral have, however, expressed their displeasure over the PIA's decision to operate only a weekly flight, and demanded daily flights keeping in view the growing demand of people.

Former MNA Maulana Abdul Akbar Chitrali has said the PIA management was indifferent to the needs and ground reality of the area as there had been a persistent demand of operating daily flight on the Islamabad-Peshawar-Chitral route.

In a statement issued here on Tuesday 18 March, he said the route was operative till 2010 on daily basis, which failed only when the number of flights was reduced to four a week.

He regretted the national flag carrier was not earnest in making the route functional, and the fresh flight schedule would also end in failure as very few passengers would opt to fly to and from Chitral because of the flight's operational uncertainty.

'I raised the issue time and again on the floor of the lower house of the parliament, emphasising the need for operating daily flights from Islamabad and Peshawar keeping in view the demand of people, but to no avail,' he said.

## Turkish airline Ajeta starts direct Istanbul-St. Petersburg flights



A ceremony marking the launch of AJet flights between Istanbul and St. Petersburg, Istanbul, Türkiye, March 15, 2025.

Türkiye's low-cost airline AJet, a subsidiary of the flag carrier Turkish Airlines (THY), announced recently it started direct flights from Sabiha Gökçen Airport in Istanbul to the Russian city of St. Petersburg.

St. Petersburg became the second Russian destination of the carrier, after Moscow.

A flight ceremony was held at the airport on Istanbul's Asian side before AJet's first flight to St. Petersburg, as the airline expanded its international flight network.

A passenger said the direct flight from Istanbul to St. Petersburg is beneficial to frequent travelers between the two cities.

The welcoming ceremony was extended to the Pulkovo Airport in St. Petersburg when the AJet aircraft landed.

Attending the ceremony, Özgün Talu, consul general of Türkiye in St. Petersburg, said the relations between Ankara and Moscow will further develop with the new flight destination to the country by the low-cost airline.

The flights to St. Petersburg will take place four days a week until the end of March and every day of the week starting in April.

Passengers will enjoy prices as low as \$99 (TL 3,630) exclusively for opening the new destination.





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## Financial adviser paid \$4.3m for failed PIA transaction

The government's first attempt to privatise Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Ltd (PIAC) cost the national exchequer \$4.3 million, the National Assembly Standing Committee on Privatisation was informed on Tuesday 25 Feb.

Secretary Privatisation Jawad Paul informed the committee that \$4.3m had been paid to the financial adviser Ernst & Young (E&Y) out of a total fee of \$6.8m, representing 63 per cent of the agreed payment. The remaining \$2.5m will be paid upon the completion of the transaction.

The secretary also informed the committee that the Privatisation Commission had carried out the valuation of properties to be retained in the PIACL, and updated valuations were reflected in the financial statements for the period ending April 30, 2024.

The committee asked the secretary privatisation to provide details of properties handed over to holding companies.

The standing committee meeting chaired by Muhammad Farooq Sattar heard Privatisation Commission officials regarding expenditures incurred on the failed attempt to divest PIACL.

Recently, the government informed the standing committee that it was making another attempt to privatise PIACL after the previous effort in which a sole investor submitted a bid of Rs10 billion, significantly lower than the minimum-set price of Rs85bn.

The lack of interest shown by the buyers during the first round of privatisation was due to multiple reasons, including the 18 per cent general sales tax on the purchase of new aircraft and the national carrier's liabilities, the committee was informed.

Amendment bill The committee discussed 'The Privatisation Commission (Amendment) Bill 2024 (Government Bill)' and objected to Clause 4, Section 7 (4), stating that the Ministry of Law must clarify whether there is any precedent where the prime minister has been given the authority to make decisions on the privatisation process instead of the cabinet.

The committee once again directed the law ministry to present relevant details in written form at the next meeting. Thereafter, the committee deferred the bill till the next meeting.

The committee was also informed

that the Lahore-based Pakistan Engineering Company (PECO) was included in the privatisation programme in August 2024. It was further reported that the company has over 32 employees and no active production line. NIT owns 23

## PIA aircraft's missing wheel found at Karachi airport

Authorities on Friday 14 March found the missing wheel of the 18-year-old PIA aircraft that landed in Lahore a couple of days ago, raising serious questions on the national flag carrier's ability to ensure proper upkeep of its fleet before they fly.

In a rare incident of its kind, the PIA domestic flight PK-306 left Karachi for Lahore on Wednesday 12 March evening, but upon reaching the Allama Iqbal International Airport it transpired that one of the six rear wheels of the aircraft was missing.

However, it landed safely with no harm to passengers and the crew.

A walk-around inspection by the flight captain after the landing revealed that one out of the six wheel assemblies on the main landing gear (rear) was missing.

As per the standard practice, the matter was taken up by the PIA's Flight Safety and Bureau of Air Safety investigation teams for a thorough probe. The reports have yet to be submitted.

The missing wheel of PK-306 has been located successfully. The wheel was found near the remote parking bay of Karachi's Jinnah International Airport, adjacent to the Ispahani Hangar, a spokesperson for the Pakistan Aviation Authority (PAA) said here on Friday 14 March. 'Technicians from the airport's wheel shop discovered the tire next to the landing gear of a grounded Boeing 777,' he said and added the incident was being investigated by the relevant authorities.

An official source told media that there was a possibility that the aircraft A320's wheel might have been dislodged during takeoff, falling off at the Ispahani Hangar. 'Had the required inspection by the engineering team of the aircraft been properly conducted, the plane might not be cleared for departure,' he said and added that although it seems to be gross negligence on the part of the PIA's department concerned, a wheel falling off during takeoff was not unusual. Some foreign airlines' aircraft have also

shares, which were bought from the open market. On the other hand, the Ministry of Industries believed that the transactions of these shares were not clear on the stock exchange.

Private sector representatives briefed the committee about various issues and highlighted that PECO is a source of pride for Pakistan, attracting visits from Chinese and Japanese industrialists. In the 1960s, the company also manufactured aircraft parts.

experienced such episodes, he said.

The source further said that A320 had a capacity to carry 180 passengers and on Wednesday's 12 March flight PK-306 some 104 passengers were aboard. He said the aircraft was 18-year-old and currently the PIA has 31 planes -16 A320s, 12 Boeing 777s and three ATRs - in its fleet.

It is the responsibility of the PIA's management to ensure the upkeep of all the aircraft in its fleet. The government, early this month, had announced that it would complete all necessary steps to privatise the Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Ltd (PIACL) within three months.

The government has addressed all concerns of the parties interested in buying the national flag carrier and decided to make changes as per their preferences. A new roadmap is being developed to make PIA more attractive for the prospective buyers, and it is expected that all stages of this process will be completed within three months,' the government said.





## AirAsia to strictly enforce regulations on power banks



**A**irAsia Philippines said it will strictly enforce the new guidelines on the use of power banks during flights.

The airline said under the new rules set by the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines, the use of power banks during flights is strictly prohibited due to safety concerns associated with lithium-ion batteries.

"AirAsia Philippines' new policy still allows the carriage of not more than two power banks, each not exceeding 100 watt-hours," the budget carrier said in a statement.

A typical 20,000 mAh power bank that delivers 3.7 volts is rated at 74Wh, while a similar-capacity power bank that deliver 5 volts is rated at 100Wh.

AirAsia added that power banks must not be stored in overhead compartments and should instead be kept with guests' personal belongings under the seat or in the seat pocket in front.

"While we understand that power banks are now part of travel essentials for our guests, safety always comes first at AirAsia. We highly encourage our guests to charge their electronic devices prior to boarding and ensure maximum compliance that is enforced by our highly trained on ground and inflight crew," said Steve Dailisan, AirAsia Philippines Communications and Public Affairs Head.

The company said it will remind travelers of this policy before boarding.

"Passengers found using power banks onboard will receive a warning, and if still non-compliance persists, the device will be confiscated and returned upon landing.

## Are power banks allowed on flights? Here's what you need to know

**A**irlines in the Philippines remind passengers that not all power banks are allowed inside the aircraft.

The advisory comes as many passengers are expected to travel this Holy Week break.

Airlines said passengers can bring and use their power banks inside the aircraft, but old and worn-out power banks are not allowed.

Power banks with a capacity of 100Wh or less are allowed on board. This is equivalent to 20,000mAh to 27,000 mAh depending on the output voltage, according to Cebu Pacific.

### Emergency Drill

AirAsia Philippines conducted a related fire drill inside one of its parked aircraft recently.

The scenario— smoke comes out of a bag stored in the overhead bin— supposedly because of an explosion of a power bank. In the drill, the cabin crew alerted the passengers nearby. Wearing protective breathing equipment, the crew extinguished the 'fire'.

The airline said it wanted to highlight the need for training and preparedness on the part of the crew and passengers through the drill.

The drill was conducted after a power bank exploded in a plane in mid-flight.

"Wornoutnao posibleng lumolobonaang

power bank? Pwede itong report at pwede mag-causeng off loading ng power bank," said Steve Dailisan, Spokesperson of Air Asia Philippines.

(Worn-out and bulging power banks can be reported and may cause the power bank to be offloaded.)

Power banks are allowed in flights, provided they are 100Wh maximum. It should also not be checked in but placed in the hand-carry bag.

### How To Calculate Capacity

BenjViray, senior cabin crew of Air Asia and the airline's Dangerous Goods Instructor, said to compute 100Wh, one should multiply the milliampere-hour (mAh) by the voltage, then divide by 1,000.

"Pagtalagang walang label, hindipoyan payagang itransport," Viray said.

(If there is no label, that cannot be allowed on board.)

Cebu Pacific said on its website that passengers may carry 2 power banks not exceeding 100Wh each.

Philippine Airlines also said it imposes a limit of 100Wh per battery or power bank, and that these should be insulated and put in a container.

Aside from big power banks, airport authorities also remind passengers not to bring prohibited items inside the aircraft.

## Cathay open to Comac aircraft in future, 'keen to see' developments first



**C**athay Pacific does not rule out acquiring Comac aircraft – including possibly the in-development C929 wide body – in the long term, but will be studying developments closely first.

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## PIA to resume UK flights in April



Surprisingly, the report mentions that the government privatised seven loss-making SOEs in January 2025. While the case of the privatisation of PIA is no mystery to anyone, it is clear that the current government has not completed any privatisation transaction.

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is set to resume flights to the United Kingdom in April, said Pakistan's High Commissioner to the UK Dr. Muhammad Faisal.

Speaking at an iftar dinner in London, attended by journalists, social media influencers, and distinguished guests, Dr. Faisal announced that PIA will initially restore flights from London and Manchester to Pakistan. He also expressed efforts to restart services from Birmingham in the near future.

The High Commissioner emphasized that the resumption of flights will be marked by a formal opening ceremony, with media representatives invited to cover the event.

He clarified that the reinstatement of flights is independent of any operational concerns related to aircraft landings. The move comes as Pakistan aims to strengthen its aviation ties with the UK, following a prolonged suspension of direct flights.

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) restarted its European operations on January 10, 2025, with its first flight to Paris, following a four-and-a-half-year ban imposed by the European Union.

The EU had suspended PIA's flight operations in June 2020 after a tragic plane crash in Karachi. The situation worsened when the then-Aviation Minister disclosed in Parliament that several pilots had been hired with fake licenses, raising serious safety concerns.

Following extensive regulatory improvements and safety compliance measures, the EU lifted the ban, allowing PIA to resume its services to European destinations.

## Emirates' retrofitted Boeing 777 to start daily Riyadh flights



Emirates is going through a major retrofit program, with some of the aircraft already being put into service on high frequency sectors. Supplied

Dubai: The Emirates airline will bring in its newly retrofitted Boeing 777s for its second and third daily flights between Dubai and Riyadh. This will start March 30 and 7 May, respectively.

This brings with it 'more opportunities to experience its latest generation Business Class seats, as well as highly acclaimed Premium Economy product', the Dubai based airline said in a statement.

This makes Riyadh the first destination in the Gulf and wider Middle East to be serviced using the retrofitted Boeing 777s from Emirates.

Emirates passengers can soon access in-flight telemedicine services on board 300 aircraft.

Emirates retrofitted Boeing 777s rolling out to six US cities.

**Emirates' upgraded Boeing 777s will operate as follows:**

- EK815 and EK816 operate with a refurbished Emirates Boeing 777 starting March 30.
- From May 7, Emirates will operate the refurbished Boeing 777 on its third service, EK 817 and EK 818, starting with six flights per week; and from 11 August 2025, the aircraft will be deployed daily.

The airline currently operates 72 weekly flights to all four gateway destinations in Saudi Arabia using a mix of Boeing 777s and A380s.

In November last, Emirates introduced the 'Chauffeur-Drive Service' in Riyadh, offering First and Business Class passengers a door-to-door journey. "Riyadh is the first and only regional destination offering CDS for premium customers, and Emirates is the only airline exclusively offering this service in Riyadh," said the statement.

## Privatization Board endorses PIA sale plan



Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) aircraft are parked

The Privatization Commission Board on Monday 17 March endorsed the transaction structure for a fresh attempt to divest 51 to 100 percent shares of Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Limited (PIACL), along with management control.

The board, chaired by Muhammad Ali, the newly appointed adviser to the prime minister on privatization/chairman Privatisation Commission, endorsed the structure and recommended it to the Cabinet Committee on Privatization (CCOP) for final approval, a senior official confirmed.

The specific terms and conditions for transferring and acquiring the equity stake will be finalised during the bidding process and detailed in the bid documents, subject to CCOP's clearance. The financial adviser for this transaction is Ernest & Young LLC, Dubai-led consortium. Regarding another transaction, the PC board decided to seek a detailed briefing from the financial adviser (FA) handling the privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines-owned Roosevelt Hotel Corporation (RHC), New York.

Notably, in December 2023, the government had hired Jones Lang Lasalle Americas Inc. (JLL), a Chicago-based real estate management firm, as the financial adviser for this transaction.

JLL was tasked with conducting due diligence of the entity and exploring transaction options, including a long-term lease, outright sale, or joint venture with the private sector. The adviser has already submitted its report to the Privatization Commission.

Now the board has decided to take briefing from the adviser. After that the report will be submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Privatization (CCoP) for approval of one of these options. Following this, expressions of interest (EoIs) will be called.

## Business losses: Financial restructuring under way at PIA, NA told



**D**efence Minister Khawaja Asif informed the National Assembly on Wednesday 19 March that the cash-starved Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has initiated a financial restructuring process aimed at tackling its ongoing problem of persistent business losses.

In a written response to an inquiry, he stated that the restructuring involved removing the bank debt of Rs268.7 billion, the government's debt of Rs170 billion, legacy operating liabilities totaling Rs188.3 billion, and employee liabilities amounting to Rs44 billion from the corporation's financial records, along with non-core assets valued at Rs26 billion.

Consequently, the negative equity saw a remarkable drop from Rs698 billion to Rs45 billion by April 2024.

PIA oruvausaibL Transaction structure recommended to CCOP.

He noted that this financial restructuring has alleviated the corporation from the heavy load of debt servicing, which previously accounted for one-third of its cash inflow.

The company has been operating since 2023, and from 2025, the corporation will turn into a profitable entity at the bottom level with the ability to fully discharge its future obligations.

In another written reply, Asif said that as of February 2025, the current employee strength at PIA is 7,104, which is within the approved Human Resources Budget (HRB) of 11,877 approved by the PIACL board of directors in 2021, resulting in a 36 per cent reduction in positions. He said that approximately 1,904 positions are still vacant.

## Kuwait gears up for Aviation Renaissance with new Airport opening in 2026

**A**cting Director General of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Duaij Al-Otaibi has confirmed the completion and operation of major projects at Kuwait International Airport such as the third runway, new control tower and Air Cargo City. In a televised interview, Al-Otaibi said the infrastructure for these projects includes power and fire stations, as well as the equipment related to radar and air navigation simulation systems. He also unveiled the plan to establish the Civil Aviation Authority, under which companies will operate, including a private company to manage airports and another to manage air navigation. He asserted "This is the ideal and most appropriate vision for the future of aviation in the country."

He expects the new Kuwait International Airport to open in the last quarter of 2026, according to the promises of the company implementing the project. He also pointed out that the Air Cargo City is one of the largest in the Middle East with a capacity for more than 77 giant cargo aircraft, indicating it is a ready-to-operate project. He disclosed that the number of infrastructure projects has reached 13; including the reconstruction of the central and eastern runways, which will be operational once the third runway becomes operational in the coming days. He cited other projects related to air navigation, weather equipment, and ground services. He added the airport terminals cater to about 16 million passengers annually; and that upon the opening of the new airport, the number is expected to reach 25 million passengers annually. He said the new airport can accommodate 27 million passengers annually. He expects the construction of another airport in the northern part of the country, in conjunction with the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port and Mutlaa City projects. He indicated this will be determined by the concerned government agencies, confirming that Kuwait is on the verge of a major renaissance in the aviation sector. He stated that aviation, along with other sectors, should contribute 25 percent of the country's national income in the next 10 years.

## Korean Air unveils new branding with first logo change in over 40 years



**K**orean Air unveiled its new livery at a launch event in Seoul on 11 March.

The airline has retained its trademark sky-blue colour in the re-design, but has introduced "a newly developed paint for a metallic effect" on its aircraft. It has simplified the wording on the aircraft, opting for 'Korean' instead of the current 'Korean Air'.

The 'Taegeuk' logo – the airline's blue and red logo for over 40 years – has also been simplified into a monochromatic dark blue.

The first aircraft to sport the new livery is a Boeing 787-10 (HL8515), which was delivered to the airline in 2024. It will return to operations on 12 March, operating its first flight between Seoul Incheon and Tokyo Narita.

Korean Air will induct "more aircraft" in the year for repainting, says marketing chief Kenneth Chang, who did not disclose a schedule. Once Asiana is merged with Korean in 2027, the former's fleet will also sport the new livery.

Apart from the new branding, Korean has also refreshed its inflight services, including its first dining menu update in 15 years.

The branding update comes about a week after airline chief Walter Cho announced a "corporate value system" – known as 'KE Way' – for Korean Air, as it marks its 56th anniversary.

Korean announced its intention to acquire the ailing Asiana in November 2020, and finally completed the acquisition in late-2024, after clearing critical anti-trust hurdles. Asiana will now operate as a subsidiary, before being fully absorbed on 1 January 2027.



## Emirates launches Emirates Courier Express



**E**mirates launches Emirates Courier Express, promising to treat packages like passengers

Emirates Courier Express uses Emirates' fleet of 250+ aircraft, vast global network and reliable partner network to deliver packages door-to-door

**Flexible and fully integrated, Emirates Courier Express is poised to solve the transportation challenges of customers, both big and small**

**Built for customers, with customers, Emirates Courier Express reinvents the express delivery experience**

Backed by almost four decades' experience in keeping goods and people moving all over the world, Emirates has launched Emirates Courier Express, an end-to-end delivery solution that is set to redefine the express delivery experience.

To ensure Emirates Courier Express addressed industry-wide challenges, Emirates worked with various global customers to pilot and finesse the product, with the goal to make it as fast, reliable and flexible as possible, before launching to market. Over the last year, Emirates Courier Express transported several thousands of packages from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, South Africa and the UK. The average delivery time is less than 48 hours. Now, Emirates Courier Express is open for business, for businesses.

Badr Abbas, Divisional Senior Vice

President, Emirates SkyCargo said, "Emirates Courier Express is an evolution in how we move goods across the globe, at speed and at scale. Building on our world-class and well-established infrastructure, and reimagining traditional logistics processes where necessary, this innovative solution does not just meet the Emirates Gold Standard of reliability and excellence but sets a new benchmark for what's possible. This is only the beginning of our vision to continuously innovate and lead the charge in the express delivery sector."

Traditionally, cross-border delivery is managed via a global hub-and-spoke model, with a package making multiple stops before arriving at its end destination. Emirates Courier Express has broken this mould. Just like passengers, packages will travel from origin to destination directly, leveraging the breadth of Emirates' vast global network and near-unparalleled flight frequencies. This approach significantly reduces time in transit, reduces package handling and offers Emirates Courier Express customers' a competitive edge in getting their goods to end users. Direct connectivity is matched with different service levels, ranging from next day urgent delivery to a two-day Premium service, along with a pipeline of innovative new products.

At launch, Emirates Courier Express will be active and available in seven markets, however the potential network growth is unlimited: wherever Emirates

flies, Emirates Courier Express can deliver. Expansion to additional markets is already in the works.

Harnessing the fleet of the world's largest international airline, Emirates Courier Express has access to over 250 all widebody passenger and freighter aircraft to move packages worldwide. Complemented by a trusted, reliable and integrated cross border network of partners to manage the customs clearance and first and last mile transportation, the solution delivers door-to-door. This integration into the airline's existing infrastructure allows Emirates Courier Express to handle volume fluctuations from seasonal spikes while maintaining cost stability, ultimately empowering customers to plan and budget with confidence.

This seamless integration also enables Emirates Courier Express to provide bespoke and tailored solutions, whether transporting fashion and mobile phones or the most critical medical equipment. A team of dedicated specialists provide niche segment solutions, facilitated by the airline's extensive freight and logistics infrastructure, including cool chain capacity, allowing the transportation of specialist or sensitive products from launch.

Prioritising ease of business, Emirates Courier Express' is entirely digital, with a purpose-built tech platform integrating directly into customer software and supports additional bespoke shipping solutions. Advanced tracking systems, real-time updates, and seamless integration, ensures complete efficiency, reliability, quality, and transparency from collection to delivery across the world.

Dennis Lister, Senior Vice President of Product and Innovation, Emirates SkyCargo said, "Emirates Courier Express is the result of challenging the status quo. Along with the industry, we watched the increasing volumes of cross border shipping and challenged ourselves to find a better way to transport these goods faster and more efficiently. The new product launch reflects our ongoing commitment to push the boundaries to introduce innovations which drive real impact and ensure our customers always have access to the fastest, most reliable and cost-effective solutions available."

# Analysis report of PIA for its saving

Captain Saeed Khan



**P**akistan International Airlines (PIA) has faced several challenges over the past 15 years that have contributed to its consistent losses. These problems stem from a combination of financial mismanagement, operational inefficiencies, weak governance, and external market pressures. Here are the key issues across various departments:

## 1. Mismanagement in Fleet Planning

- \* **Aging Fleet:** PIA's fleet includes older aircraft, which are less fuel-efficient, more maintenance-intensive, and less attractive to passengers compared to modern fleets operated by competitors.
- \* **Inconsistent Fleet Strategy:** Poor planning in fleet acquisition and leasing. A mix of aircraft types results in higher maintenance costs, inefficient crew utilization, and logistical complexities.
- \* **Underutilization:** Low aircraft utilization rates compared to global benchmarks, leading to reduced productivity.
- \* **Delayed Maintenance:** Poorly planned maintenance schedules often result in aircraft grounded for extended periods, further reducing operational efficiency.
- \* **Lack of Skilled Workforce:** Inadequate investment in training and development of engineers, leading to subpar maintenance quality.
- \* **Dependence on Foreign MROs:** Outsourcing major maintenance tasks to foreign MRO facilities increases costs.
- \* **Neglected Infrastructure:** The existing engineering facilities are outdated and underutilized, unable to support efficient maintenance or attract third-party business.
- \* **Parts Shortages:** Poor inventory management and delays in procuring spare parts often disrupt operations, grounding aircraft unnecessarily.

## 3. Marketing and Route Management

- \* **Unprofitable Routes:** Operating loss-making routes due to political

pressures or lack of demand has drained resources.

- \* **Ineffective Marketing:** Outdated branding, weak digital presence, and lack of competitive promotional strategies have failed to attract passengers in an increasingly competitive market.
- \* **Overstaffing:** Excessive workforce compared to the number of operational aircraft results in higher operating costs.
- \* **Poor Alliances:** Lack of partnerships with other airlines for code-sharing and interline agreements limits PIA's network reach.
- 4. **Passenger Services**
  - \* **Substandard Customer Experience:** Complaints about delayed flights, poor in-flight services, and lost baggage damage PIA's reputation.
  - \* **Inconsistent Product Offering:** Older cabin interiors, poor catering services, and lack of investment in modern in-flight entertainment systems have driven passengers to competitors.
  - \* **Weak Loyalty Program:** PIA's frequent flyer program is outdated and does not offer significant value compared to global standards.
- 5. **Financial and Organizational Mismanagement**
  - \* **Corruption and Nepotism:** Frequent accusations of corruption, political appointments, and favoritism have undermined efficiency.
  - \* **Mounting Debt:** PIA's debt burden continues to rise due to years of financial losses, leading to heavy reliance on government bailouts.

- \* **Weak Revenue Management:** Poor ticket pricing strategies fail to maximize revenue, often resulting in underpriced tickets during peak demand and overpriced tickets during off-peak periods.
- \* **Lack of Accountability:** Frequent changes in leadership and lack of clear accountability have created an unstable organizational structure.

## Key Recommendations

1. **Modernize the Fleet:** Focus on acquiring fuel-efficient aircraft like the A320neo or Boeing 737 MAX for short-haul routes and 787s or A350s for long-haul operations.
2. **Improve Engineering and Maintenance:** Invest in state-of-the-art MRO facilities, recruit skilled engineers, and streamline parts procurement 3. 4. 5. 6. processes.

**Restructure Operations:** Close unprofitable routes, increase aircraft utilization, and optimize the workforce to fleet ratio.

**Enhance Marketing Efforts:** Develop a strong digital presence, introduce competitive ticket pricing, and focus on customer experience improvements.

**Increase Revenue Streams:** Develop ancillary services (e.g., excess baggage, in-flight sales) and attract third-party MRO customers.

**Implement Governance Reforms:** Introduce merit-based hiring, increase transparency, and ensure accountability for decisions at all levels.

With the right leadership, strategic vision, and a comprehensive restructuring plan, PIA can potentially regain its position as a leading airline in the region. However, addressing these challenges requires sustained effort and commitment from both the management and the government.

*An analysis by a patriotic Pakistani for the National Flag carrier*



Captain Saeed Khan has over 46 years of flying experience, having spent 16 years as a fighter pilot in the PAF. He has worked as a captain for seven different commercial airlines, including PIA, Saudi Arabian Airlines, Fly Egypt, United Airlines, Global Jet, and Blue Sky Aviation. In addition to his flying experience, he has over 38 years of management experience.



## A plane crash survivor's story of hope and resilience



**B**anker Zafar Masud, one of the two survivors of the crash of the PIA plane in Karachi in 2020, shared his memories of the crash which also culminated in writing of his book, *Seat 1C: A Survivor's Tale of Hope, Resilience of Renewal*, written in collaboration with Syeda Amna Hasan.

The book was launched in a session, moderated by Tooba Masood, on the second day of the Lahore Literary Festival at Alhamra on Saturday 22 Feb.

Zafar said the people believed that his survival was due to his seat location in the plane at the time of the crash but he did not buy that argument as he believed that it was God's will and He wanted it to happen that way. He added that the publisher thought that it (the seat number) was something that would attract the sale; hence, they gave it the title of *Seat 1C*.

When asked by Tooba what led Zafar to write the book and whether he wanted a catharsis and what could people take from it, he said that in the late 2021, he was invited to write an article for a newspaper where he was required to detail his post crash experiences and he thought they were unique musings, which needed to be shared. 'I just hope and pray that nobody goes through the experiences that I went through but since I had gone through it I owed it to the people to share those with them in whatever way that would help them improve their life.'

Speaking further on the subject, Zafar Masud said some of the experiences were a part of his childhood development and some of them were new learning. He added that he thought it was important to write something about it and he realized that in this transitory world, something of permanent nature had to be left behind and this book was a kind of contribution to that part.

'I have tried to avoid drama and made an attempt to make it more matter-of-fact but the fact is that the whole crash was so emotional and so sad that there are certain

parts of it which could trigger some emotions in the victims' families for which I apologies (to them).

He said Syed Amna Hasan must be acknowledged for her contribution to the book as he thought that the account in the book should be something literary that he himself would like to read and relate to. He said the book needed some research and he also wanted it to be an interesting read with language etc and the credit went to Amna for making it happen. He added that it was her language that's used in the book.

Amna said though her words were there in some parts of the book but it was very much his voice, telling the narrative.

Replying to a question, Zafar said the most difficult part for him was to talk about his loved ones and how they pulled him out of the trauma which would have been impossible without his amazing family besides his friends and colleagues.

When asked about the process of writing the book and any challenges in the way, Amna said they started the project with general conversations about the memories of Zafar about the crash. She would fill in the gaps, for example, before the plane crash, he lost consciousness at one point and then there was a gap that needed to be filled with the details like what happened after the plane crashed in Model Colony. She said she spoke to Zubair, the only other survivor of the crash, who had vivid memories of that day and his input was very important.

She said she had got accounts of the eyewitnesses and residents of Model Colony and those who had pulled Zafar out of the wreckage and took him to the ambulance. Besides, there were accounts of paramedics too and all these details made the story more real.

Amna told the audience that they had got the cockpit recordings and details of the Civil Aviation Authority that investigated the crash. She said the difficult part was writing about the rescue scenes because there was only chaos and that chaotic memories and trauma had a complicated relationship. She said people were visiting the crash site weeks after the incident and people in the Model Colony as well as rescuers were annoyed by it and her and Zafar's struggle was to be careful not to look like being a part of whole voyeurism and being respectful to the people who had suffered due to the crash.

## Aviation sector strives to meet decarbonization goals

The aviation sector is at a critical juncture, with updated state action plans for decarbonisation due to be submitted to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), the World Economic Forum (WEF) says in a new report.]

The report, produced by 'Airports of Tomorrow', a WEF initiative bringing together leaders from across the aviation industry, says industry stakeholders are increasingly looking to advance aviation decarbonisation activity in tandem with boosting growth postCovid-19, posing challenges to progress on sustainability.

The actions that industry and governments across the world take this year will be vital to ensure the aviation sector remains on the right flight path to meet internationally agreed targets, including reducing the carbon intensity of jet fuel by 5percent by 2030 and attaining net-zero international aviation by 2050, according to the report.

Alignment of SAF policies across regions and longevity of subsidies are crucial for encouraging investment and ensuring consistent SAF adoption across regions. In 2024, Asia Pacific emerged as akey market: several countries introduced supportive policies, while China is expected to unveil detailed SAF policies this year.

In Pakistan, the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank group is providing up to \$35 million in equity and debt financing to SAFCO Venture Holdings Ltd (SAFCO Ventures) to help establish Pakistan's first greenfield sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) facility, which will convert thousands of tonnes of used cooking oil and other waste oils into aviation fuel, helping to reduce global emissions.

The WEF report says the availability and cost of SAF are the biggest challenges for aviation decarbonisation in 2025.



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## Airbus unveils new light twin-engine H140, entry into service expected in 2028



Airbus Helicopters has introduced its H140 rotorcraft which is expected to enter service in 2028 for emergency medical services.

The multi-mission helicopter was unveiled during the vertical lift industry show verticon in Dallas, Texas, Airbus announced on March 11, 2025. The company said that the helicopter “raises the bar” in the light twin-engine category, for “performance, cost-effectiveness, and passenger and crew comfort.”

“Introducing a new helicopter to the light twin engine segment is a testimony to our commitment to meeting our customers' evolving mission requirements, leveraging our R&T programs such as Bluecopter,” said Bruno Even, CEO of Airbus Helicopters.

The H140 is a 3-ton-class rotorcraft designed for the emergency medical services, passenger transport, and private and business aviation markets.

According to Airbus, the H140 features a new T-shaped tail boom with an optimized Fenestron that reduces sound levels, a five-blade bearingless main rotor, and new engines. The helicopter also features a larger cabin space, large windows and optimised cabin layout that can accommodate up to six passengers.

The company said the H140 was “designed with accessibility in mind” with its large clamshell doors and the high tail boom, and its rear loading capabilities allow the use of different types of stretcher systems, including those for intensive care and transport incubators.

The helicopter is powered by the SafranArrius 2E 700 shp engine, Airbus stated. It has two engines controlled by a dual-channel full-authority digital engine control (FADEC) system. The system ensures high performance during normal operations and offers considerable power reserves if one engine fails.

The new H140 also features the same five-bladed rotor system that was introduced on the H145 in 2019. The H140 will also feature Helionix, Airbus Helicopters' avionic system, which is also used in the H135, H145, H160 and H175.

In total, the company will have four dedicated prototypes of the H140 helicopter, with the first aircraft already undergoing flight tests at the company's facility in Donauwörth, Germany.

## China's first 1-tonne payload cargo drone completes maiden flight



China's first large cargo drone capable of carrying one tonne of payload, the TP1000, completed its maiden flight on Saturday 15 March morning in Qingdao City, east China's Shandong Province.

The innovative aircraft is notable for being the country's first large unmanned transport aircraft equipped with airdrop capabilities.

Developed fully in accordance with China's civil aviation standards for large cargo drones, the TP1000 has a takeoff weight of 3.3 tonnes and a maximum payload capacity of 1,000 kilograms. Compared to its predecessor, the TP500, the new model boasts increased cargo capacity and extended range, with a maximum range of 1,000 kilometers when fully loaded.

Together, these drones will form a complementary product lineup designed to meet the rapidly growing demand for low-altitude cargo transport.

China's TP1000 large cargo drone completed its maiden flight in Qingdao

City, east China's Shandong Province, March 15, 2025.

The TP1000 is also equipped with smart airdrop functionality, enhancing its emergency response and disaster relief operation capabilities.

"The maiden flight lasted 26 minutes, and the aircraft's performance was stable throughout. All performance metrics met our expectations. During the flight, the drone exhibited excellent stability, maneuverability and power system performance, with all parameters remaining within ideal ranges," said Jin Ge, the leader of the TP1000 research and development team.

The TP1000 is expected to enter operational service by 2026, representing a significant advancement in China's unmanned aerial vehicle technology and logistics and emergency response applications.

## Small Cargo Operation; A look at the short 330 cargo aircraft

Small cargo operations are essential for transporting goods to and from remote and underserved areas. They can offer unparalleled efficiency and flexibility that cannot be matched by other means of transport.

Remote areas often lack extensive infrastructure, such as short runways or direct roads or rail, and rely on small cargo operations as key components of their supply chains.

Smaller aircraft also allow for increased flexibility and freedom. It is much easier to differentiate transported goods and there is usually no need for specialist equipment to load and unload the cargo.





## Turkish Cargo hosts Iftar Dinner in Karachi

**T**urkish Airlines Cargo recently organized a grand Iftar dinner at the Pearl Continental Hotel, Karachi, to honor its business partners, cargo agents, and media representatives. The Consul General of Türkiye in Karachi graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, alongside senior officials from Turkish Airlines Cargo.

In his address, the Consul General praised the strong bilateral relations between Pakistan and Türkiye, emphasizing Pakistan's welcoming environment for Turkish investments. He reaffirmed that while Türkiye and

Pakistan are two countries, they share a deep-rooted bond as one nation. He also acknowledged Turkish Airlines' strong presence and success in the Pakistani market.

Earlier the Chief Cargo Officer (CCO) delivered a comprehensive presentation, highlighting Turkish Cargo's future prospects, digital upgrades, and integrated Multimodal Transportation (IMC) solutions. The CCO emphasized the company's commitment to innovation and customer satisfaction. In his speech, he highlighted Turkish Airlines' remarkable growth and achievements. He

shared that the airline recorded a 24% growth in the previous year and also noted that Pakistan is the perfect market for cargo for Turkish Airlines.

The evening's festivities were amplified by an engaging quiz session, testing participants' knowledge and adding a fun element to the event. The night culminated with exciting awards, including Business and Economy class tickets, presented to the lucky winners.

The event served as a wonderful platform for networking, fostering relationships, and celebrating the spirit of Ramadan.





## ***AirSial hosts a Board of Directors meeting in Sialkot***

**A**irSial, held its pivotal Board of Directors (BOD) meeting this month under the leadership of Chairman Mr. Fazal Jilani. The session,

attended by Senior Vice Chairman Mr. Qaiser Iqbal Baryar, CEO Mr. Ameen Ahsan, and other esteemed Directors focused on strategic initiatives to

strengthen the airline's market position, enhance operational efficiency, and expand its footprint in domestic and international aviation.





## Ocean container rates slide as US tariffs shadow logistics planning



The container ship *MOL Majesty* is shown at the Port of Los Angeles-Long Beach complex in this undated photo.

**R**ecent developments in United States trade policy have once again thrown the global supply chain into a state of flux as President Donald Trump's moves to impose and then partially suspend some tariffs have created significant disruption and uncertainty for businesses operating in North America.

That uncertain feeling has extended to ocean container rates, already in the throes of the traditional early-year lull, according to the Freightos Baltic Index.

The initial announcement of 25% tariffs on all U.S. imports from Mexico and Canada sent shockwaves through the logistics industry. However, within days, the administration issued a one-month reprieve for automotive goods covered by the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, later extending this suspension to all imports under the agreement. This impacts an estimated 50% of imports from Canada and 38% from Mexico, including automotive goods, food and agricultural products, and many appliances and electronics.

The remaining imports, valued at approximately \$1 billion per day, now face the 25% tariff increase. This category encompasses a wide range of products from phones and computers to medical equipment. The sudden implementation and subsequent partial suspension of these tariffs have led to significant disruptions in cross-border shipments and surface volume flows from both Mexico and Canada.

This tariff seesaw is not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern of Trump using trade policy as leverage for various goals, wrote Judah Levine, head of research for Freightos, in a note accompanying the most recent data. In this case, the stated objectives include

addressing border security concerns and stemming the flow of fentanyl and illegal immigration. However, reports suggest that part of the reprieve was due to auto manufacturers' pledge to shift some production from Canada and Mexico to the U.S.

The uncertainty created by these rapid policy shifts has made planning and adjustments extremely challenging for shippers, Levine said. Many are adopting a wait-and-see approach before committing to significant supply chain changes. However, the looming threat of tariff increases, particularly on imports from China and other U.S. trade partners, prompted some importers to frontload ocean shipments since November, boosting ocean demand and freight rates.

Recent data from the National Retail Federation shows that U.S. ocean import volumes from November through February were approximately 12% higher than the previous year, indicating a significant pull-forward effect. While volumes are projected to remain strong through May, a weakening is expected in June and July, suggesting a softer start to the traditional peak season due to the earlier frontloading.

The impact of these trade policy fluctuations is also evident in container rates. Trans-Pacific container prices have continued to decline post-Lunar New Year, with rates to the West Coast down to \$2,660 per forty-foot equivalent unit and \$3,754 per FEU to the East Coast. These figures represent a 40% decrease compared to the previous year and are at or just below the 2024 low seen after the Lunar New Year.

Similarly, ocean prices on the Asia-Europe trade have dipped below last year's low in recent weeks.

Asia-North Europe rates increased 3% to \$3,064 per FEU. Asia-Mediterranean prices stayed level at \$4,159 per FEU.

While general rate increases at the start of March slowed the decline, pushing rates up by a couple hundred dollars, this increase fell well short of the \$1,000 hike carriers had announced. Asia-Mediterranean prices have stabilized and are roughly on par with rates from a year

ago.

The recent weakness in rates, particularly on trans-Pacific routes, may be attributed to a combination of factors, Levine said. These include a post-Lunar New Year lull in demand and the recent carrier alliance reshuffle, which has resulted in increased competition and less effective capacity management as carriers adjust to newly launched services.

As the industry navigates uncertainty, several key deadlines loom ahead. These include the March 24 United States Trade Representative hearing that will inform a decision on proposed port call fees; the April 1 deadline for agency reports on various trade issues as requested in the president's America First Trade Policy memo, and the newly established April 2 deadline for potential 25% tariffs on USMCA goods.

## Notice to PIA for not compensating family of pilot killed in crash

The Lahore High Court on Monday 17 March issued notices to Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and others on a contempt of court petition over the airline's failure to provide compensation to the family of a pilot killed in Karachi plane crash.

Justice Shahid Karim heard the petition filed by Salman Azam, a brother of the deceased pilot, questioning the noncompliance with the court orders by the authorities. The petitioner's lawyer informed the court that the pilot, the petitioner's brother, was flying the PIA aircraft that crashed in Karachi in 2020.

The counsel pointed out that the court had previously ordered the PIA to provide compensatory benefits to the heirs of the pilot, but the airline had failed to comply with the orders. He argued that defying court orders amounts to contempt of court and is a punishable offence. He asked the court to initiate contempt proceedings against the PIA officials.

The judge heard the arguments and issued notices to the PIA and other respondents for submission of replies within two weeks. A PIA Airbus A320 had taken off from Lahore and crashed in Karachi on May 22, 2020.

The catastrophic aviation disaster took the lives of 97 passengers including the crew and two people on the ground. Only two passengers had survived the crash.





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## Another cargo airline downsizes operations as parcel business dries up



*Air Explore has decided to curtail flying Boeing 737-800 freighters and instead sublease the planes to other operators or return them to their owners.*

**A**irExplore, a Slovakia-based contract carrier for other airlines, is disengaging from cargo flying because of limited demand for narrow body freighters and will focus on its passenger business, Freight Waves has learned.

The news follows other recent examples of small or midsize airlines that provide supplemental capacity to network carriers discontinuing or downsizing cargo operations amid a glut of standard-size freighters and stagnant parcel volumes.

Air Explore, a subsidiary of Lithuanian-owned holding company Avia Solutions Group, earlier this month issued a vague statement about changing its approach to cargo operations to align with market conditions. The statement was buried in a news release about airlines securing additional airlift from third-party providers to keep up with travel demand.

The airline is reducing its cargo fleet by two or three aircraft, returning aircraft to lessors and subleasing some units to other carriers because of the slowdown in business, spokesperson Silvije Sileike said in an email message. It continues to seek long-term transportation service agreements for its remaining aircraft.

"We were presuming that the e-commerce and narrow-body freighter market would grow more significantly after Covid, but the situation in the market is not as we expected. Currently, we are optimizing our fleet and focusing on the passenger business," she explained.

As recently as last month, Air Explore's operating fleet included eight Boeing 737-800 converted freighter aircraft. It added some cargo jets last year and in November earned U.S. approval to begin passenger and cargo operations in

U.S. airspace under a conditional foreign carrier permit using large aircraft on charter from other providers.

Aircraft tracking site Flightradar24 shows only two cargo jets currently in operation – one in Europe and one in Africa. The Planespotters.net database shows three aircraft are in parked status.

Sileike said AirExplore has leased one freighter aircraft to Allied Air Nigeria, which operates for DHL Express in Africa, and another to Ascend Airways Malaysia, a new carrier owned by Avia Solutions Group that expects to begin operations late this year. Air Ascend Malaysia, a business-to-business passenger and cargo airline, is waiting for Malaysian authorities to issue an air operators certificate.

### **Regional cargo carriers get squeezed**

Air Explore's rethink about air cargo operations is not unique. Sister company smart Lynx Airlines is shelving its fleet of Airbus A321 narrow body freighters after losing a contract with DHL Express in Europe and having difficulty finding other customers. It too is returning planes to lessors, placing some aircraft with affiliated companies and subleasing to other carriers.

Avia Solutions Group last year shut down Iceland-based Bluebird Nordic, which operated Boeing 737-400 and 737-800 converted freighters, because it couldn't generate enough business during and after the airfreight downturn that lasted until the second half of 2023. The airline, which provided crewed aircraft to DHL, FedEx, UPS and other airlines, returned its fleet to lessors.

Canadian passenger airline West Jet closed its freighter division which utilized four 737-800s, after one year because it couldn't generate enough business providing scheduled cargo service.

Global Crossing Airlines in Miami last year capped its freighter fleet at four Airbus A321 freighters because of thin business but has recently seen a pick up in demand.

Miami-based Amerijet, which operates larger Boeing 767 converted freighters, cut its fleet in half over the past two years and currently runs about 11 aircraft.

## British Airways' NDC content now live in Sabre's travel marketplace

**A** leading global travel technology company, recently announced the launch of British Airways' New Distribution Capability (NDC) content in Sabre's travel marketplace. Sabre-connected travel agencies worldwide can shop, book, and service NDC offers alongside traditional ATPCO/EDIFACT options.

By activating NDC through Sabre, agencies will seamlessly manage British Airways' offers and orders via Sabre Red 360, Sabre Red Launchpad™, and the Sabre Offer and Order APIs. Sabre's multi-source content strategy enables NDC content to integrate smoothly with traditional ATPCO/EDIFACT options, providing a unified shopping experience that simplifies workflows and enhances productivity.

British Airways' Chief Commercial Officer, Colm Lacy, said: "At British Airways, we want to give customers a seamless digital-first retailing experience, so we're pleased to extend access to our exclusive NDC content, using Sabre's technology, to our agencies worldwide. This will open up even more ways for agencies to search, book, and service our offers, all whilst providing a more personalised experience for customers across the globe."

"Sabre is proud to continue leading the way in NDC adoption by providing robust technology solutions that empower our customers to evolve with the industry," said Kathy Morgan, Senior Vice President, Distribution Experience, Sabre Travel Solutions. "Our partnership with British Airways demonstrates our commitment to building a modern travel marketplace where agencies have access to the most comprehensive content portfolio available."

Currently, thousands of agencies in over 150 countries use Sabre's NDC capabilities to efficiently shop, book, and service dynamic airline content. By incorporating BA's NDC content, travel sellers gain access to more personalized offers, enabling them to stay competitive and deliver exceptional value to travelers.





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## Potassium sulphate at Gwadar Port: Export approval likely for 2 firms under close watch



**T**he federal government is likely to allow two companies to export potassium sulphate from Gwadar Port along with strict monitoring of quantitative restrictions to be put in place in customs WeBOC system in order to check export data on real-time basis, sources told.

Sharing the details, sources said, two major industries namely M/S Agven Private Limited (fertilizer) and M/S Hangeng Trade Company Private Limited (meat and agriculture processing) are fully established and operational in the Gwadar North Free Zone.

M/s Agven is a fertilizer production company registered in North Free Zone. The company has started production of potassium sulphate from its plant with a capacity of producing

Potassium Sulphate fertilizer overall consumption in Pakistan is 50,000 tons per annum (average as per National Fertilizer Development Center data), whereas the overall production installed capacity in Pakistan is 65,000 tons per annum, including the 20,000 tons per annum in Gwadar Free Zone.

The company intends to export its production abroad in its application of October 28, 2024.

The company has stated that it does not use any subsidized raw materials or resources from Pakistan including use of gas as raw material.

The main raw material viz potassium chloride is directly imported from abroad. It is not sourced from the tariff area of Pakistan and does not impact the supply of fertilizer for domestic use.

According to MoMA, export of urea/fertilizers is banned and are subject to the provisions of serial No.11 and 12 of Schedule-I of Export Policy Order, 2022.

Multiple meetings have been held with Ministry of Industries and Productions, Commerce, and FBR to resolve the issue but the only way forward found out is to relax the Export Policy Order, 2022 for the export of potassium sulphate (K<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>) fertilizer from Gwadar Port.

Gwadar Port Authority has supported the request of the company for exemption of the Export Policy Order, 2022 to the extent of potassium sulphate (K<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>) fertilizer by M/S Agven Pvt Ltd, as the export of the commodity would help in development and operationalisation of Gwadar Port.

The export will also allow the expansion of capacity inside Gwadar Free Zone and generate export revenue.

The draft summary was circulated to the Ministries of Commerce, Industries & Production, National Food Security & Research and Federal Board of Revenue for views/comments. Besides, Ministry of Industries & Production conducted two meetings and another meeting was held by SIFC on export of potassium sulphate fertilizer from Gwadar Free Zone.

In the light of deliberations, input from the stakeholders and decisions taken in the above meetings, the proposal of the Summary has been amended. Minutes of the meeting of FRC and views of all the stake holders are identified respectively. All stakeholders have supported export of a maximum of 10,000 tons of Potassium Sulphate (K<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>) per annum by the manufacturing companies in Gwadar Free Zone with some stipulations.

MoMA has that Ministry of Commerce may make amendment in Serial No. 12 of Schedule-I of the Export Policy Order (EPO), 2022, inserting exception in column 4 for companies manufacturing in Gwadar Free Zone for export abroad of Potassium Sulphate fertilizer (K<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>) (HS. Code: 3104.3000) from Gwadar Port in relaxation of EPO, 2022 subject to following stipulations: (i) a maximum of 10,000 tons per annum or 50% of the actual annual production of potassium sulphate, whichever is less; (ii) this

permission will be for one year till 31st December 2025 and will be implemented in two parts by allowing a maximum 5,000 tons by June 30th 2025, and remaining 5,000 tons by December 31, 2025 (plus or minus any balance quantity to June 30th); (iii) Ministry of Industries and Production/Fertilizer Review Committee (FRC) will ensure to collect data input related to Production and export abroad on monthly basis from the manufacturers inside the Gwadar Free zone and will review the export abroad on annual basis; (iv) Ministry of Industries & Production will notify the decision for export abroad of potassium sulphate fertilizer (HS Code 3104.3000) and convey the same to the FBR and the relevant ministries/divisions; and (v) the FBR will update its system with respect to export abroad of Potassium Sulphate (K<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>) as per above detail from Gwadar Port.

## Which European Airlines will buy the Comac C919?



Paul Harley

Simple Flying reported recently that Comac the Chinese manufacturer of the C919, is aiming to achieve European certification for the aircraft in 2025.

Achieving certification with the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) is a notoriously rigorous process. But Comac completed its fourth round of on-site assessments last year, and is reportedly set to begin flight tests this year. Europe is Airbus' home turf, but some European airlines might see some advantages to the C919 over the A320 family, not least the lower purchase price and earlier delivery slots.

So with that in mind, which European airlines might purchase the C919?



## Multiple accords to boost economic ties with UAE

Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed multiple agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) for cooperation in various sectors, including banking, mining, infrastructure, and railways.

The deals were inked on the occasion of UAE Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan's first formal visit to Pakistan.

The visiting royal and PM Shehbaz Sharif witnessed the exchange of pre-signed documents.

Members of the federal cabinet (albeit before its expansion later in the day), Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir, and members of the UAE delegation were also present at the occasion.

The crown prince, who was accompanied by a high-level delegation of senior officials and business leaders, first met with PM Shehbaz for a one-on-one discussion, followed by delegation-level talks. The presence of senior security officials in the delegation suggested that the two sides also touched upon security-related matters.

During their meeting, Sheikh Khaled and PM Shehbaz discussed the transformation of the Pakistan-UAE ties from strong political relations into a mutually beneficial economic partnership. The prime minister emphasised the significance of the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan Railway Line project, noting that its completion would enhance connectivity and benefit the ports of Gwadar and Abu Dhabi.

He also welcomed the UAE's interest in expanding its investment portfolio in Pakistan, highlighting the successful investment initiatives between various Pakistani entities and Abu Dhabi ports as a testament to growing cooperation.

The PM said it was a matter of huge satisfaction that the two countries were now working more closely than ever before to transform their excellent political ties into a mutually beneficial economic partnership.

Sheikh Khaled thanked the prime minister and reaffirmed the UAE's steadfast support for Pakistan's economic development and prosperity.

PM Shehbaz also shared the update of his meeting with the UAE crown prince in a social media post, describing the visit as fruitful. 'Honoured to welcome HH Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Chairman of Abu Dhabi Executive Council.



*Holding an umbrella, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif welcomes UAE Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at Nur Khan Airbase, on Thursday 27 Feb.*

We held the most fruitful discussions and resolved to further strengthen our excellent bilateral ties through enhanced trade, investment & energy cooperation. With the encouragement and support of the UAE's royal family, Pakistan-UAE ties are growing from strength to strength,' the premier said in a post on X.

Nishan-i-Pakistan ceremony Following his meeting with the prime minister, Sheikh Khaled also called on President Asif Ali Zardari. During their discussion, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening ties, particularly in business, infrastructure development, cultural exchanges, and people-to-people contacts.

Later, President Zardari conferred the Nishan-i-Pakistan the country's highest civilian award upon Sheikh Khaled in recognition of his contributions to promoting economic, trade, and investment cooperation between the two nations.

The special investiture ceremony was held at Aiwan-i-Sadr (President House).

Welcoming the crown prince, the president said that Pakistan and the UAE enjoyed long-standing people-to-people and cultural ties spanning over three generations and emphasised the need to pass on this legacy to future generations to further cement the historic bond.

The president appreciated the remarkable development achieved by the UAE under its leadership.

He expressed Pakistan's appreciation for the UAE's unwavering support for Pakistan and cooperation in various sectors.

He emphasised the importance of fostering closer economic and trade relations and invited UAE investors to explore new opportunities in Pakistan's emerging sectors.

The crown prince reiterated the UAE's commitment to enhancing its cooperation with Pakistan, adding that the MoUs signed during his visit reflected the trust and enduring relations between the two countries.

In a statement, the Foreign Office described the visit as a testament to both countries' commitment to enhancing mutual cooperation, reflecting a growing partnership and robust people-to-people linkages.

**The £13bn megaproject that aims to bypass the Suez Canal**



**Al Faw Grand Port is currently under construction on the coast of Iraq.**

Located between Europe and Asia, Iraq holds a strategic position, and in the Middle Ages, it was a key trading hub along the Silk Road. Today, Iraq is building a 740-mile shipping shortcut between Asia and Europe called the Development Road as well as the Al Faw Grand Port on its coastline. The Development Road is a shipping trade route that will connect the Grand Faw port in Iraq to Turkey, significantly reducing travel time for goods moving between both continents.

The £13 billion project will be financed by Iraqi and Turkish Government money and outside investors. Recently, the [Suez Canal](#) has had its fair share of challenges and instability, with the Red Sea attacks, which have led to a significant fall in global trade.

## US moves closer to controlling Panama Canal as BlackRock-Led deal buys Chinese-held

The United States is one step closer to reclaiming a strategic foothold in the Panama Canal as a BlackRock-led consortium strikes a £17.92 billion (\$23 billion) deal to acquire key port operations from Chinese-owned CK Hutchison. The deal, which President Donald Trump hailed as a victory, marks a significant shift in global trade power and has already sparked political controversy.

### Inside the BlackRock-Led Takeover

The BlackRock-TiL Consortium and Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison have reached an agreement in principle to transfer control of 43 ports across 23 countries. The deal includes a 90% stake in Panama Ports Company (PPC), which operates the crucial Balboa and Cristóbal ports, as well as an 80% controlling interest in Hutchison Ports Holdings subsidiaries and associated companies. Notably, the agreement excludes CK Hutchison's operations in Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and South.

The Panama government must approve the deal before it is finalised, and the wider Hutchison acquisition remains subject to regulatory approvals and due diligence. The transaction agreements for PPC are expected to be signed by 2 April 2025.

### A 'Commercial' Deal With Political Undertones

Executives from BlackRock, Terminal Investment Limited (TiL), and CK Hutchison have been keen to emphasise that the transaction is purely commercial. BlackRock Chairman Larry Fink described the deal as a 'powerful illustration' of their investment strategy, while GIP Chairman Bayo Ogunlesi highlighted the consortium's 'substantial expertise in owning and operating ports.'

However, the timing and nature of the deal have raised eyebrows. In a recent address to Congress, Trump linked the deal to his administration's broader push to 'reclaim' the Panama Canal, stating:

'My administration will be reclaiming the Panama Canal, and we've already started doing it. Just today, a large American company announced they are buying both ports around the Panama Canal.'

Trump has repeatedly claimed—without evidence—that China exerts control over the Panama Canal and has hinted at possible military action to 'take it back' from Panama, a long-standing US ally in Latin America. The Panama Canal Authority and Beijing have denied any foreign interference, with Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian stating:

'China supports Panama's sovereignty over the canal and is committed to maintaining its status as a permanently neutral international waterway.'

### Why the Panama Canal Matters

Completed in 1914, the Panama Canal is a vital trade artery linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It spans 50 miles and drastically reduces shipping times, handling approximately 12,245 vessels per year. In 2021 alone, it generated nearly £2.34 billion (\$3 billion) in toll revenue, marking an 11% increase from the previous year.

An American-controlled Panama Canal would revive the historical US oversight from 1914 to 1999, during which the US managed security and operations before transferring control to Panama. While the move could bolster US trade interests, it also risks increasing geopolitical tensions, particularly with China, Panama's second-largest customer.

### What's Next?

With Trump openly championing the deal, many expect the Panama government to scrutinise the sale. Panama has the right to reject the agreement, and reports suggest officials may be reassessing the deal's implications. If approved, the acquisition would solidify US influence over a critical global trade route while potentially provoking backlash from China and Panama.

Despite assertions that the transaction is 'purely commercial', it is clear that political forces are shaping the future of the Panama Canal. Whether the US ultimately regains full control remains to be seen, but this deal brings it one step closer to that reality.

**Egypt Suez Canal monthly revenue losses at around \$800 million, Sisi says**



*Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi attends the extended format meeting of the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia on October 23, 2024.*

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said on Monday 17 March that the monthly losses of the Suez Canal revenues reached around \$800 million due to the regional "situation", as Yemen's Houthis have been attacking vessels in the Red Sea.

The Iran-backed Houthis have attacked vessels in the Red Sea area since November 2023 in support of Palestinians in Gaza during the war with Israel, disrupting global shipping by forcing vessels to avoid the nearby Suez Canal and reroute trade around Africa, raising shipping costs.

The Egyptian presidency statement did not directly refer to the Houthis, but Sisi said in December the disruption cost Egypt around \$7 billion in less revenue from the Suez Canal in 2024.

The Yemeni group [recently vowed](#) to resume attacking U.S. vessels in the Red Sea, in response to deadly U.S. strikes on Yemen that killed at least 53 people on Saturday, in the biggest U.S. military operation in the Middle East since President Donald Trump took office in January.

They also said recently they would resume attacks on Israeli ships passing through the Red Sea if Israel did not lift a block on aid entering Gaza.



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## New York announces early end to Roosevelt Hotel lease



*Under the original lease, New York was to have control of the hotel until June 2026.*

Pakistan and New York City officials are set to begin negotiations regarding the future of the Roosevelt Hotel in Manhattan, after the city's mayor announced the early termination of an agreement that repurposed the prime property into a shelter for refugees. The hotel, which opened in 1924, is named after former US President Theodore Roosevelt.

It is located next to the Grand Central Terminal, the main train station in the Big Apple.

In 2023, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) which owns the iconic property signed a three-year lease with the city, worth around \$220 million.

Under the lease, the city was to have control of the hotel until June 2026, after which it would be returned to PIA. The arrangement was initially made to accommodate the increasing number of migrants arriving in New York due to the humanitarian crisis at the US-Mexico border.

During a news briefing on Monday, 24 Feb NYC Mayor Eric Adams confirmed that the city would be ending its lease with PIA and closing down the Asylum Arrival and the Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief centres at the Roosevelt Hotel.

Today, we announced we will begin the process of closing down the Roosevelt Hotel's Asylum Arrival Centre, Mayor Adams said, adding that the closure would take place by June this year, a full year ahead of the end date for the original lease.

Despite the decision to terminate the lease, city officials clarified that the hotel would continue to provide shelter to migrants until June. The move comes after a significant decline was witnessed in the number of new migrant arrivals, dropping from 4,000 per week at the peak of the crisis in 2023 to approximately 350 per week in recent days.

The use of the Roosevelt Hotel as a refugee shelter drew sharp criticism from various quarters. Critics, especially from the conservative 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) movement, raised concerns about the substantial taxpayer spending on housing asylum seekers.

The hotel's conversion into a shelter also prompted a backlash from businesses in Manhattan and conservative political figures. Former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy was one of the most vocal critics, calling the arrangement an example of wasteful government spending.

Earlier this month, Mayor Adams launched legal action against the Trump White House after the latter reversed the transfer of \$80.5 million in Congress-sanctioned funds earmarked for immigrant services that had already made their way into a City Hall bank account.

Without a doubt, our immigration system is broken, but the cost of managing an international humanitarian crisis should not overwhelmingly fall onto one city alone,' Politico quoted him as saying.

The NYC mayor also faces the prospect of a lonely mayoral race another topic he addressed in the presser on Monday 24 Feb. as most of his close aides have bowed out in the wake of his legal troubles over corruption charges.

From Pakistan's perspective, the premature termination of the agreement is concerning, as it could potentially affect PIA's revenue expectations. The \$220 million lease was seen as a valuable income stream for the national airline, which has faced financial challenges in recent years. Given that the Roosevelt Hotel is a historic property in prime Manhattan real estate, it is unlikely that a replacement for this lucrative lease can be found anytime soon.

Further complicating matters is the issue of damage to the hotel during its use as a shelter. Reports indicate that the property has sustained some deterioration due to the strain of housing migrants for over a year, including wear and tear to the rooms and facilities.

While city officials have maintained that repairs will be considered, the cost of refurbishing the building before it is returned to PIA could place an additional financial burden on New York taxpayers or the city government.

## China focusing on Karakoram Highway, ML-1 projects, says consul general

The Chinese consul general Yang Yundong has said both China and Pakistan are focused on the completion of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) and the Main Line-1 (ML-1) project, media reported.

The Chinese envoy expressed this commitment at a time when the government and the ministry of railways are expecting a long-awaited visit of the high-powered technical team from China within weeks.

Just a day ago, federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi told the media in Lahore that the government might fund the ML-1 project from own resources in case international funding was unavailable.

In September last year, China agreed to assist Pakistan in completing four major projects namely ML-1, M-6 and M-9 projects along with the second phase of Karakoram Highway (KKH) and the construction of Kaghan-Naran, Jhal Khand, Babusar Top and Tunnel till KKH.

*Yang Yundong says bilateral ties at crucial point, asks both sides to seize opportunity to boost cooperation in various fields*

Speaking at a press briefing for 'Two Sessions for 2025' at the Chinese consulate general on Friday 14 March, Yang said, "Both sides are working very hard to complete these projects."

The new international airport in Gwadar, which was completed only last year, would also contribute in opening more opportunities, he said, adding that both countries were encouraging more ships to use the Gwadar Port for trade.

The 'Two Sessions' marked an annual event pivotal to China's economic and social development. Yang revealed that China achieved the major targets for the year's economic and social development in 2024.

"Chinese modernisation has made significant new achievements, with high-quality development advancing steadily



and new productive forces developing robustly,” he said, adding that China anticipated GDP growth of around 5 per cent.

“At the same time, China will continue to expand high-standard opening up to the outside world and promote the deep and substantive advancement of the high-quality joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative,” he added.

He said major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics had opened

new horizons, and international cooperation achieved fresh progress for China.

“This year’s government work report emphasised that China will adhere to an independent and peaceful foreign policy, remain committed to the path of peaceful development, and steadfastly pursue an open strategy of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation,” he continued.

The Chinese official said that 2025 marked the 10th anniversary of President Xi Jinping’s historic visit to Pakistan,

adding that the two countries would celebrate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations next year.

“China-Pakistan relations are at an important juncture and development opportunity,” he said, adding that both countries and their peoples should seize this opportunity to further enhance communication and coordination, deepen practical cooperation in various fields, and upgrade the CPEC.

## Pakistan unveils new rail links to boost economy



**F**ederal Railways Minister Hanif Abbasi announced completing new rail links on Friday 14 March. These projects connect regions and enhance transport efficiency.

During a press conference, Abbasi highlighted traders’ enthusiasm for moving goods across Pakistan via rail. However, he acknowledged current limitations, yet promised these connections will aid businesses and tourism.

Abbasi emphasized that rail transport offers a cost-effective solution compared to other methods. Consequently, goods trains will generate higher revenues and support the economy significantly.

He also revealed plans to finalize the ML-1 project, a critical national priority. If friendly nations assist, progress

accelerates; otherwise, Pakistan Railways will independently complete it.

To boost regional ties, Pakistan explores a new Pakistan-Afghanistan rail link to Central Asia. This ambitious Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan project already has a signed memorandum of understanding.

**New Rail Links Drive Economic Growth**

Pakistan Railways awarded a contract for the 105-kilometer Tharparkar Railway to link coal mines. Officials expect this project, aligning with economic goals, to finish by October 2025.

Both Sindh and federal governments will fund this transformative railway initiative fully. The project includes a 105-kilometer track and a 24.58-kilometer

loop-line for efficiency.

This network will transport 10 million tons of coal annually, slashing fuel import costs. Experts predict annual savings of \$1.5 billion, shifting power generation to cheaper Thar coal.

**New Rail Links Strengthen Infrastructure**

Seven new railway stations with 14 platforms will enhance the route’s accessibility greatly. Two major hubs at Thar mines and New Chhor will anchor this development.

Experts project savings of \$1.5 billion annually by reducing reliance on imported fuel. Thus, railway upgrades will modernize Pakistan’s infrastructure and economy effectively.

## US national hunts Kashmir Markhor in second attempt



*American hunter James Walker Crawford with his trophy in Rumbur valley, Lower Chitral.*

The US national had obtained permit from the wildlife department paying 52,000 US dollars (Rs14,534,000).



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## Safe tourism app introduced for Neelum valley

In a bid to promote safe tourism and ensure the safety of visitors, the administration in the breathtaking Neelum Valley of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has launched an internet application alongside policy guidelines for the tourism sector.

The app, developed in collaboration with the AJK Information Technology (IT) Board, aims to keep the administration updated on tourist accommodations, contact details, and itineraries, Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Neelum, Nadeem Ahmed Janjua, told *Dawn* on Thursday.

Last year, the valley, which boasts a 150-kilometre main road stretching from Nauseri to the scenic village of Taobutt along the Neelum River, welcomed over 550,000 tourists from across the country, Mr Janjua said.

"With 40 link roads and 8-10 fair weather roads connecting the valley's population of 220,000 to their homes, accessibility is both a challenge and a blessing," he added.

Highlighting safety concerns, Mr Janjua pointed out that the valley, like

other high-altitude regions, was prone to natural disasters such as cloudburst-induced floods, avalanches, and landslides.

These hazards, combined with the challenging mountainous terrain, often led to fatal accidents, particularly among tourists unfamiliar with local road conditions, he said.

Additionally, he pointed out that incidents like selfie-related falls and tragedies caused by negligence, such as leaving gas or coal heaters running, had underscored the need for stricter safety protocols.

"In such unfortunate situations, it becomes difficult for the administration to contact the victims' families promptly, which is why the app is a game-changer for us," he asserted.

Mr Janjua informed that earlier in the day, a meeting with representatives of the local Guesthouse and Hotel Association had been convened to brief them on the app's utility and operational requirements.

"It was decided that comprehensive data of tourists staying in the valley would be recorded through the app. In areas where internet access is unavailable, this information will be communicated via phone to the local police station, which will transfer it to a pro forma and ensure its submission to the Superintendent of Police's office by 1pm daily," he said.

The DC also elaborated on the safety measures mandated by the administration.

He said the newly inaugurated rest houses, guesthouses, and hotels were required to install fire extinguishers and emergency exits.

"Management is also directed to discourage guests from approaching

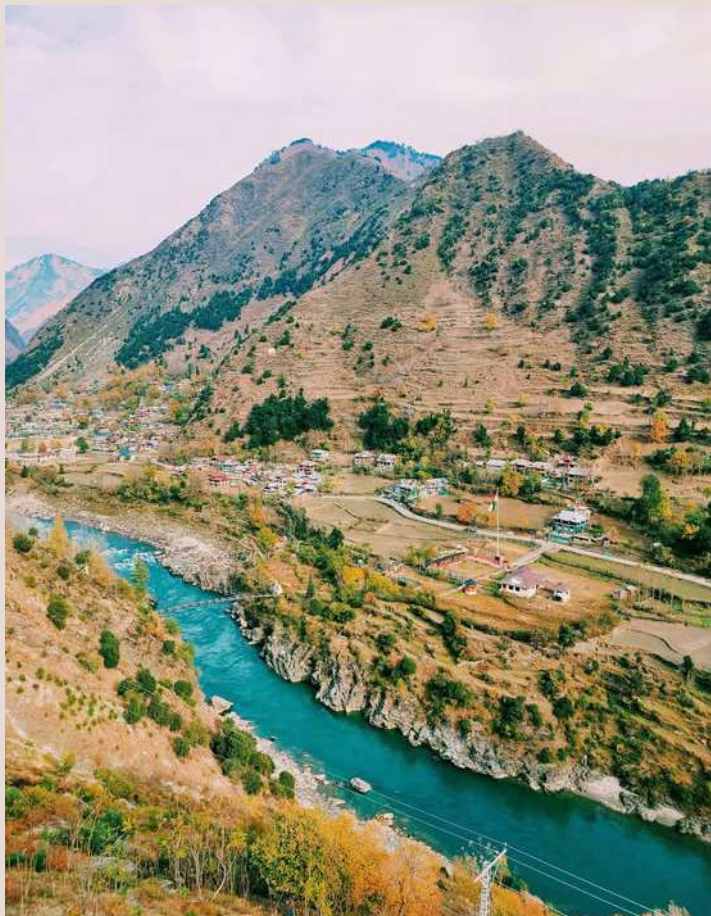
dangerous water channels and to prominently display advisory notices and emergency contact numbers in every room."

For tourists venturing to high-altitude destinations such as Ratti Gali, Patlian, and Baboon, only well-maintained vehicles operated by licensed drivers would be allowed, he said, adding that registered tour operators had been instructed to comply with this requirement without exception.

## Rakaposhi the 27th highest mountain in the world



Rakaposhi, meaning "Shining Wall" or Dumani, meaning "Mother of Mist" in Burushaski, is a prominent mountain in the Karakoram range, located in District Nagar of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan standing 7,788 meters (25,550 ft) tall. It is notable for its uninterrupted 6,000-meter descent from summit to base. Rakaposhi, the 27th-highest mountain in the world, offers stunning views of the Nagar Valley from the Karakoram Highway. Rakaposhi's first successful ascent was in 1958 by a British expedition. It is home to endangered species like the Marco Polo sheep, snow leopards, and brown bears. Rakaposhi View Point, also known as the "Zero Point of Rakaposhi," offers the closest view of the stunning Rakaposhimountain and its surrounding natural beauty. Located on the Karakoram Highway (KKH) in Ghulmet village, Nagar Valley, it is a popular stop for travelers between Gilgit and Hunza. The Karakoram Highway, more than just a road connecting Pakistan and China, is lined with scenic spots, cultural heritage, and archaeological sites, attracting tourists to pause and explore. At Rakaposhi View Point, visitors can relax, enjoy breathtaking views of the 7,788-meter Rakaposhi, and sit by the glacier-fed streams. In summer, many dip their feet in the cool water while taking in the scenery. Over the years, the viewpoint has developed with improved infrastructure, driven by increasing tourist numbers. The mountain, glacier, greenery, and flowing streams make it a must-visit spot for nature lovers.



## Foreign climbers rescued from Koh-e-Makra base

Two foreign adventurers, who had got stranded in heavy snowfall and rough weather while on a mission to summit Koh-i-Makra, the highest peak in the Kaghan Valley, were rescued by the police on Sunday 23 Feb.

Thanks to Allah Almighty, we have successfully rescued Italian and French adventurers, who were stranded at the base camp of Koh-i-Makra for over 19 hours due to heavy snowfall and rough weather,' district police officer Shafiullah Khan Gandapur told reporters in the Shogran tourist resort here.

A police team led by Mr Gandapur carried out the rescue operation after Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Inspector General of Police Zulfiqar Hameed and Regional Police Officer Nasir Mehmood Satti were informed by the respective embassies about the missing foreigners.

The Koh-i-Makra peak is 12,746 feet above the sea level.

We immediately launched an operation upon receiving the information and spent the entire night conducting the rescue. Both visitors were safely shifted from the base camp to the Shogran tourist resort, Mr Gandapur said.

He explained that due to heavy snowfall and worsening weather conditions, the foreigners had lost contact with the police and their respective embassies, necessitating the nighttime rescue operation.

'We have been taking all possible measures to ensure the security and safety of foreign tourists visiting the Kaghan Valley for recreation and adventure activities' Mr Gandapur added.

The DPO said that the operation was carried out swiftly as the Meteorological

Department had forecast another heavy spell of snowfall in Kaghan Valley within the next 24 hours.

The rescued foreigners Francois and Carlo who are affiliated with the United

## How to get a 5-year multiple entry Schengen Visa from Pakistan

The 5-year Multiple Entry Schengen Visa is an attractive option for travelers and tourists looking for convenience and flexibility when visiting Europe.

As more people seek opportunities for long-term travel, business, or personal reasons, it's important to understand how to apply for this type of visa.

This visa allows holders to visit any of the 26 Schengen Area countries without needing to apply for a new visa each time. Valid for five years, it permits a maximum stay of 90 days within a 180-day period.

One key factor in securing this visa is that applicants who have held a multiple-entry visa valid for at least two years in the last three years are more likely to be approved for a new multiple-entry visa.

Additionally, applicants who can demonstrate a need for frequent travel to the Schengen Area have a higher chance of approval.

While the final decision lies with the embassy, tour operators suggest that securing a 5-year multiple-entry visa is highly likely for those who travel to the Schengen area two to three times a year on a single-entry visa.

Nations, recounted their ordeal. 'We had set out to summit Koh-i-Makra, but the weather turned rough, followed by heavy snowfall, which left us stranded at the base camp,' they said.

Pakistan Zindabad, bravo to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police for rescuing us at the right time and safely bringing us to Shogran,' one of the rescued adventurers exclaimed in praise.

## Pakistan upgrades passport system with high-speed printers



Two advanced e-passport printers and six desktop printers from Germany have arrived in Karachi, aiming to enhance the passport issuance process in Pakistan. A foreign technical team has also arrived to oversee the installation of these new machines.

Director-General of Passports, Mustafa Jamal Qazi, visited the e-printers section upon their arrival and received a briefing on the installation process. He highlighted that the newly acquired printers have the capability to print 1,000 passports per hour, significantly improving efficiency.

Qazi stated that once the printers are fully operational, the passport issuance process will become even more efficient, ensuring faster service for applicants. He also emphasized Pakistan's commitment to providing top-quality passport services globally.

The installation follows last year's upgrade when 10 modern passport printers were introduced, doubling the production capacity of the Passport Department. With these improvements, the department can now process 40,000 passports daily, up from the previous 20,000.

The new additions are expected to further reduce delays, benefiting thousands of Pakistanis, especially those traveling abroad.





## Travel and tourism sector likely to generate over \$4b in revenue by 2025

Pakistan's travel and tourism sector is expected to generate over \$4 billion in revenue by 2025, as per the latest research report of Statista on Pakistan's Travel and Tourism industry. The industry is set to grow at an annual rate of 6.75% from 2025 to 2029, potentially reaching a market volume of \$5.53 billion by the end of 2029.

Managing Director of Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) Aftabur Rehman Rana informed that this growth is being driven by both domestic and international travelers exploring the country's vibrant cultural heritage and natural wonders, said a press release on Tuesday 18 March.

He informed that the domestic tourism is a major driving force behind the growth of Pakistan's travel sector. More and more Pakistanis are opting to explore their own country, urged by improved infrastructure, higher disposable incomes, and a growing sense of national pride. Additionally, the role of social media and online booking platforms has made planning trips more convenient and accessible.

He also highlighted the macroeconomic factors, such as government initiatives, infrastructure improvements, increase in private sector investment in hotel industry, better visa facilitation, improved marketing and promotion in international markets and the expansion of international flight routes, which are also contributing to the rise of Pakistan's tourism industry.

He said, Interest in visiting Pakistan is soaring, with the BBC, CNN and Financial Times all recently naming the region as one of the must visit destinations for 2025.

He added that enhanced security

measures and improved direct flight connectivity can further help in boosting the confidence of international visitor and making Pakistan a more appealing destination for both domestic and international visitors.

## Maryam gives nod to tourism, heritage authority

Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Tuesday 4 March gave approval for establishment of 'Punjab Tourism and Heritage Authority' for promotion of tourism and upkeep of heritage sites in the province.

She also approved the construction and restoration of 170 tourist sites and trails in the province.

She was presiding over a meeting that decided that tourism sites would be developed in various cities, including Lahore, Multan, Bahawalpur, Chakwal and Jhelum.

The meeting decided to develop Chhanga Manga Forest Park and Lal Suhanra National Park for the promotion of eco-tourism.

It was also decided that the Punjab Tourism and Heritage Authority Act 2025 would be presented in the assembly to improve governance and promotion of tourism. The meeting was informed that the first 'Magnificent App' for promotion of tourism in Punjab has been developed, and will be launched soon. It was told that the app will allow the users to have a virtual tour of 170 tourist destinations in Punjab and also includes various other features, including hotel booking etc.

Under the tourism plan, religious, historical, heritage and ecotourism will be promoted across Punjab.

Tourist villages will also be built to provide the tourists a sense of proximity to ancient civilisation of the area, besides development of tourism trails for the first time in Punjab, that would include The Mall, Lahore's walled city, Sikh sites and Mughal monuments on the GT Road. Besides, Sikh tourism trails will also be developed in the Salt Range, Bhati Gate, Taxali Gate, Gujranwala and Almanabad. Tourist places in different cities will be developed as 'Tourism Clusters'.

## ITB Berlin 2025: Global travel trends, sustainable tourism, and emerging destinations



In this episode of Focus, we attended ITB Berlin 2025 and met tourism leaders who highlighted sustainability, technology, and new travel experiences shaping the future of global tourism.

ITB Berlin 2025 brought together 6,000 exhibitors from 170 countries and highlighted key developments in global tourism.

Patricia Yates, CEO of Visit Britain, presented film tourism as a way to attract visitors. Marga Nograles, CEO of the Philippine Tourism Board, discussed sustainable tourism initiatives, while Made Ayu Marthini, Indonesia's Deputy Minister of Tourism, highlighted the role of local communities.

Sayaka Usui of JNTO spoke about promoting disaster-affected regions in Japan. Meanwhile, Florian Sengstschmid, CEO of the Azerbaijan Tourism Board, introduced 'slow food travel' as part of cultural tourism. Discussions also focused on adventure tourism in Oman and long-term tourism strategies in Saudi Arabia.



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## From resolution to reality: The enduring legacy of March 23, 1940

Unlocking historical mysteries can be crucial in offering unseen possibilities for addressing contemporary challenges, particularly those arising from democratic crises and institutional instability. Pakistan's tumultuous history reflects its leaders' failure to uphold the principles of the Lahore Resolution, including sovereignty, autonomy, and nationalism. However, Pakistan's resilience presents an exceptional narrative of both opportunities and challenges in South Asia. As we approach 2047 — the centenary of Pakistan's independence — there is an opportunity to rethink our course and work towards a future that honours the nation's founding ideals.

The British imperialists' biased attitude toward their subjects tarnished their image as rulers who showed little regard for human dignity in India. Ayesha Jalal, in her book *Muslim Enlightened Thoughts in South Asia*, argues that colonial rulers reframed history to serve their empire, suppressing indigenous narratives. The British failure to respect Indian sentiments ultimately led to the War of Independence in 1857. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan emphasised that Muslims should draw lessons from their past and cultivate adaptability in changing circumstances. For him, the empowerment of Muslims through both historical awareness and modern education was the key to their transformation.

One of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's key ideas was to make Muslims conscious of their distinct identity, laying the groundwork for the Two-Nation Theory. This theory unified Muslims across classes and castes, fostering cultural and linguistic bonds. These connections strengthened the Muslim community, creating a religio-cultural homogeneity that solidified the idea of a separate identity. Over time, this unity bolstered the demand for separate electorates, a demand that was eventually accepted by the British under the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909.

The Indian National Congress (INC) acknowledged Muslims as a separate community for the first time, largely due to Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's efforts. As an INC member, Jinnah ardently championed Muslim rights. However, as Hindu antagonism grew, Jinnah parted ways with the INC in 1920. Events like the Khilafat and Hijrat Movements reinforced the belief among Muslims that the Two-Nation Theory was valid. These experiences demonstrated that a long-term coalition with Hindus was not feasible.

In response to political upheaval and

communal tensions, the British formed the Simon Commission in 1927 to assess the implementation of the Government of India Act of 1919. However, the commission failed to gain cooperation from the INC and the All-India Muslim League (AIML). Meanwhile, the British imposed the Rowlatt Act, curtailing civil liberties and fueling resentment. Discontent escalated with the Amritsar massacre, a brutal act that became a focal point of national unrest.

The Nehru Report (1928) opposed separate electorates for Muslims and called for Hindi to be the official language. In response, Jinnah's 14 Points (1929) advocated a federal system with uniform autonomy for provinces and safeguards for Muslim culture. These points laid the foundation for the legal and political struggle of Muslims in the subcontinent.



Dr Allama Muhammad Iqbal's 1930 presidential address at the AIML's annual meeting played a pivotal role in shaping Muslim political consciousness. His vision gained clarity in the 1933 pamphlet *Now or Never*, which introduced the term 'Pakistan'. The Government of India Act of 1935 proposed a constitutional framework granting the provinces autonomy. However, both the AIML and INC had reservations about the Act.

Despite concerns, both parties contested the 1937 elections. Congress emerged dominant, forming ministries even in Muslim-majority provinces. Congress introduced the Wardha Scheme, marginalising Muslims. This experience underscored the perils of a Congress-led government. H.V. Hudson cites Jinnah as stating that "Congress leaders were so obsessed with smashing the Muslim League that they left no stone unturned to

do so."

World War II altered the political landscape. The Viceroy unilaterally declared India at war with Germany, and the British promised India full dominion status post-war. However, the INC refused to cooperate and resigned from ministries, marking December 22, 1939, as the Day of Deliverance for Muslims. The Lahore Resolution of 1940 transformed the Muslim League into a mass movement. Congress dismissed it, labelling it the Pakistan Resolution.

The resolution declared that no constitutional plan would be acceptable unless it was designed to group Muslim-majority regions into independent states. This resolution solidified the Two-Nation Theory and provided Muslims with a clear political direction. Jinnah asserted that India's 90 million Muslims were a nation, not a minority, demanding a separate homeland.

The Lahore Resolution underscored Muslims' distinctiveness from Hindus and provided a roadmap for resolving political identity issues. By emphasising territorial sovereignty, it laid the legal foundation for a Muslim nation-state. The resolution transformed the AIML's strategy, shifting focus from securing rights within a united India to demanding full independence.

The creation of Pakistan on August 14, 1947, was a monumental success but came with challenges, including securing economic and military resources, managing large-scale migration, and handling disputes with India. Security threats led Pakistan to join US-led alliances under the Eisenhower Doctrine amid Cold War tensions.

Post-independence, Pakistan faced a leadership crisis that exacerbated security concerns, delayed constitution-making, and deepened regional and ethnic divisions. Political and bureaucratic elites' policies fostered disharmony, intolerance, and extremism. Internal rivalries among provinces hindered national unity, as political discourse fluctuated between resource exploitation and regional grievances.

During the 1950s and 1960s, politics in Pakistan was shaped by evolving identity consciousness. The One Unit scheme, aimed at enforcing integration, fueled resentment among smaller provinces. The Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) consolidated power under General Ayub Khan's military regime, curtailing democracy and intensifying political conflicts. The failure to uphold the Lahore Resolution's principles contributed to the traumatic dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971.



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The post-1973 political landscape saw successive military regimes fostering extremism and intolerance. Political polarisation deepened, leading to institutional imbalances. Electoral processes lost credibility, with rigging allegations undermining democracy. General Ziaul Haq's excessive religionisation of politics destabilised Pakistan's democratic framework. His era ended abruptly in 1988, but its effects lingered.

From 1988 to 1996, four general elections resulted in alternating PPP and PML-N governments. Political instability persisted until 1999, when the military seized power under General Pervez Musharraf. His tenure saw Pakistan embroiled in the US-led war in Afghanistan, further compromising national sovereignty.

The 2008–2018 period saw two successive civilian governments, but political instability continued. The 2013 elections marked PTI's emergence as a political force. In 2018, PTI formed the federal government but was unable to complete its tenure, exacerbating instability. The current government faces economic challenges and political compromises, with unrest in Sindh over Indus River canal projects being a major concern.

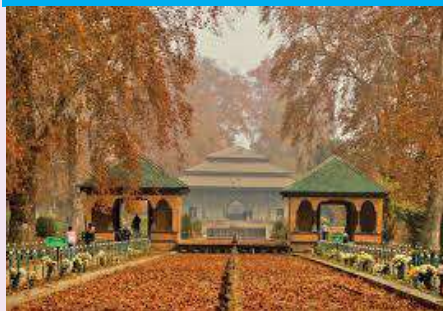
To realign governance with the Lahore Resolution's spirit, the government must ensure provincial autonomy, strengthen institutions, and promote transparency. Matters between the federation and provinces should be deliberated within the Council of Common Interests (CCI), as mandated by Article 154 of the 1973 Constitution. An independent judiciary must be safeguarded to ensure the fair administration of justice.

Pakistan's legal framework must be reformed to address contemporary security challenges. A robust judicial system is crucial for maintaining law and order. Furthermore, digital transformation must be gender-inclusive and accessible nationwide to preserve history and culture. Encouraging youth to study history can help counter falsehoods and misinformation against Pakistan.

Unless the government prioritises national interests over political expediency, there is little hope for sustainable development. As we celebrate March 23, it is imperative to chart a new course — one that fosters economic growth, institutional reforms, and technological advancements. Only by doing so can we create a country brimming with opportunities for future generations.

The writer is a professor and director of the Pakistan Study Centre, University of Sindh, Jamshoro.

## Shalimar Gardens crumble as authorities look away



**H**istoric Shalimar Gardens have been in dilapidated condition for a long time and there is no scheme in sight to conserve the site, enlisted as one unit along with the Lahore Fort in the list of Unesco World Heritage Sites.

Heritage lovers and residents of nearby areas of the garden have criticised the Punjab government and Walled City Lahore Authority (WCLA) for doing nothing to maintain the gardens a Mughal era complex comprising gardens, pavilions, terraces, royal bath (Hamam) and various other recreational facilities.

'For the last five or six years, we have not seen anyone visit this place for the purpose of conservation or at least minor repairs to keep the gardens intact,' says a resident who lives by the garden's entrance near the Govt Shalimar Postgraduate College.

'Look at this long, wide and tall boundary wall, which is in dilapidated condition and may collapse if kept ignored,' he points towards the wall.

'The authorities must visit the site immediately and get the conservation works started without wasting any more time in this regard,' he stresses.

According to the Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA) website, the Shalimar Gardens occupies some 80 acres and since 1981, the Shalimar Gardens were designated as a Unesco World Heritage Site, considered a prime example of Mughal garden design and architecture.

'Dilapidated condition of the gardens, especially the boundary walls and absence of conservation clearly reflects disinterest of the WCLA—which has also started expanding to other heritage sites in Punjab,' says DrAjaz Anwar, the president of Lahore Conservation Society.

This shows that the authority has no plan to conserve or maintain it. Its only interest is to mint money from the tourists through ticketing, photo shoots and other

so-called or cosmetic action to please the government.

Dr Anwar says that some time ago, a part of the gardens' wall also collapsed that enabled the people to enter and carry out photo shoots. Besides this, the ground level of the localities surrounding the area also rose, lowering the ground level of the gardens.

'This is devastating the gardens badly, especially in the monsoon when the rainwater mixed with sewage accumulates in the gardens off and on.

I had also pointed out this issue while discussing with a local politician a few years ago, but no action was taken in this regard,' he laments.

He urges the chief minister and other high-ups to intervene and make efforts to conserve and maintain such an important spot.

Mr. Anwar has recommended to the government to better hand over the Shalimar Gardens to the archaeology department, which, in fact, has adequate skills/expertise to deal with such issues.

WCLA Director (Conservation and Planning) NajamSaqib admits the facts related to dilapidated condition of the gardens, especially its boundary walls, gates etc.

'In fact, we took over control of Shalimar Gardens from the Archaeology Department around 18 months ago. And when we took over, this department used to allocate onlyRs500,000 for repair/maintenance each year. It is very sad, he says.

He adds that the authority had requested the Punjab government to release special funds to immediately start some work(s). And finally, the authority was given Rs100m or so to start some conservation works inside the gardens pavilions at first, second and third terraces, royal bath, plants nursery and some other places.

Side by side, the works worthRs150m or so at various monuments at the fort have also been launched.

Mr. Saqib dispels the impression about negligence by the WCLA.

'In fact, the archaeology department is responsible for this (negligence).

He says the authority plans to launch mega schemes in the near future and these schemes would be part of its annual development plan for the next fiscal year starting from July 1.

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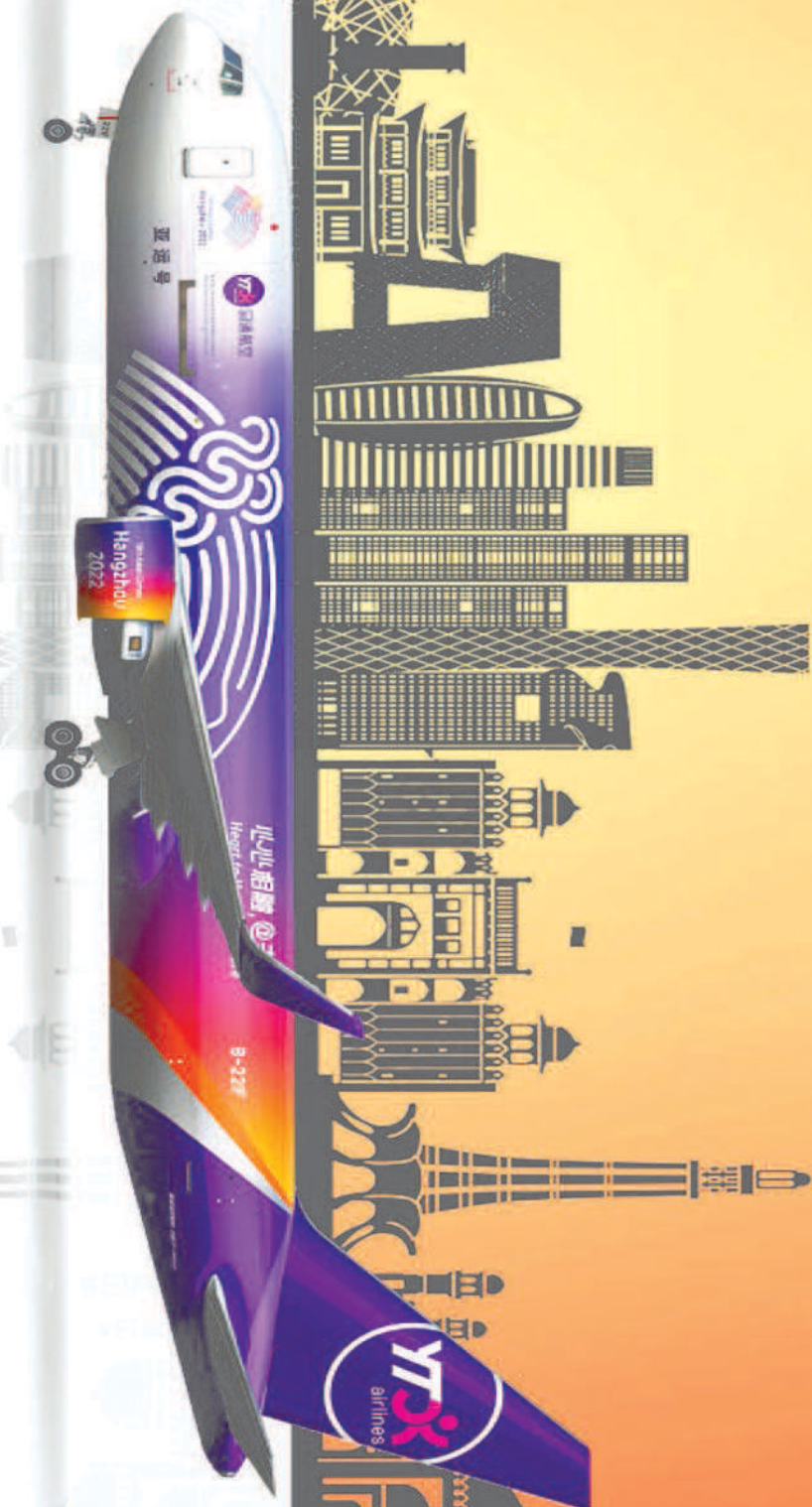
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