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Correction

The names of the two persons were printed incorrectly in our April 2025 issue on pages 90 & 91. The correct names are as follows:



Mr. Muhammad Saeed Bhatti
CEO LEXER International
Sialkot



Mr. Moazzam Malik CEO,
CHERRY, Sialkot



Pakistan's biggest defence export deal of JF-17 with Azerbaijan

With the PAF acquiring new J-10CE and J-35 fighters, the strategic role of the extensive JF-17 fleet is set to evolve. The aircraft is being repositioned as a scalable support asset for standoff weapons deployment, a transition dependent on the PFX Alpha upgrade program.

The export deal with Azerbaijan is a key enabler, though its most significant value may lie not in its commercial price but in how it supports the domestic industry's capacity for this complex integration work.

For a detailed analysis of how these interconnected factors will shape the PAF's future force structure, continue reading and subscribe to Quwa for access to the full article and all other Quwa research and analysis.

On 06 June 2025, the Government of Pakistan announced that it finalized a landmark sale of 40 JF-17 Thunder multirole fighters to Azerbaijan in a deal valued at up to USD \$4.6 billion.

This announcement (which was originally posted on the social media platform X, but deleted recently) was the first definitive confirmation of both the Azeri JF-17 deal and several key specifics, particularly the total cost and the number of aircraft involved.

The sale is not only the single biggest third-party export order of the JF-17 to date, but it is also Pakistan's largest single export order as well. Efforts to secure this order date back to at least 2019, when the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) initiated a campaign to promote its mainstay multirole fighter to Azerbaijan, Malaysia, and Argentina.

However, the net revenue share returning to Pakistan will not include many of the high-value inputs, such as the turbofan engine, steel for the airframe, radar and other subsystems, and the manufacturing workshare of Pakistan Aeronautical Complex's (PAC) main partner, the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC).

That said, even if the commercial value of the Azeri deal is relatively limited to Pakistan, it could still offer a boon to the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) in numerous other ways, not least in securing a critical funding track for the continued development and customization of the JF-17.

Market Pricing Adjustment

One aspect that stood out in the apparent value of the deal was its cost, i.e., USD \$115 million per unit. Granted, a total unit price that is several multiples higher than the flyaway cost is to be



expected after ground support equipment (GSE), spare parts, training, ammunition, and other inputs are factored into the equation.

However, is this per-unit price point relatively high in the context of the JF-17, which is positioned as a 'low cost' fighter? Or is this a reflection of the upward pricing trajectory of the combat aircraft market

generally amid factors like inflation and unstable supply chains.

Regarding the Azeri JF-17 order, the actual answer is somewhere in the middle: combat aircraft have certainly gotten more expensive in a nominal pricing standpoint, but Azerbaijan also might have ordered a custom configuration to align with its security interests and goals.





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PIA flights operations to Gulf

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) announced on Tuesday 24 June it has resumed flights to Gulf countries following a [ceasefire](#) between Iran and Israel, though passengers face several hours of delays.

Flight operations in the Gulf were affected on Monday 23 June due to the regional “war situation,” a spokesman for PIA said.

PIA had suspended flights to Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates on Monday 23 June night after Iran attacked American forces at Qatar's Al-Udeid air base.

However, Qatar reopened its airspace on Tuesday 24 June, issuing a NOTAM, enabling flights to resume.

“PIA's air operations to Gulf countries is moving towards resumption,” a spokesman for the national flag carrier said on Tuesday 24 June.

After operations resumed, PIA flight PK 245 from Islamabad to Dammam departed at 12:30pm with a 15-hour delay.

Flight PK 743 from Karachi to Madina, diverted on Monday, departed at 1pm with a 14.5-hour delay.

PIA flight PK 713 from Lahore to Madina also departed at 1pm with a seven-hour delay and flight PK 209 from Sialkot to Sharjah departed at 1pm with a 15-hour delay.

Additionally, flights from Multan to Dubai PK 221, Sialkot to Doha PK 251, Karachi to Jeddah PK 761 and Islamabad to Abu Dhabi PK 261 departed for their destinations at 1pm.

“With the departure of these flights, PIA's air operations to Gulf countries have been restored,” the spokesman said.

However, he noted: “Due to the delayed departure of these flights, returning will also be delayed.”

Passengers are requested to contact PIA's call centre or website for timely flight information.

“We apologise for the inconvenience caused to passengers; however, the decision to restrict operations last night was taken in accordance with air safety regulations,” the spokesman added.

PAA e-Gates project

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) has concluded the design phase of its e-Gates project for Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore

international airports after a series of stakeholder workshops.

A PAA spokesman said the initiative aims “to introduce biometric-based automated border control at major airports to significantly enhance passenger facilitation, reduce wait times, and improve security”.

PIA resumes Lahore-Paris flight after five years

The PIA has resumed Lahore-Paris flight five years after the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) lifted ban on its operations in Europe.

The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and UK authorities had suspended permission for PIA to operate in the region in June 2020 after Pakistan began investigating the validity of pilots' licences following a deadly plane crash in Karachi that killed 97 people.

Following the ban lift on PIA by the EASA in November last year, the national flag carrier had resumed Islamabad-Paris flights early this year. “We can operate for any destination in Europe now (except the UK) after the lifting of ban by the EASA. However, it depends upon traffic on specific routes in Europe,” a senior official of PIA told media on Wednesday 18 June.

He said the PIA was also hopeful that its operation for the UK would resume in a couple of months as well. “Talks with the UK authorities concerned are underway and hopefully the PIA will be operating flights there in a couple of months,” he said.

On Wednesday 18 June, the first weekly flight PK-733 departed from Lahore's Allama Iqbal International Airport for Paris, France, with 276 passengers on board.

The PIA has been operating two weekly flights from Islamabad to Paris since January this year.

“A Boeing 777 aircraft was deployed for this route, featuring a newly refurbished cabin interior designed to enhance passenger comfort,” a PIA spokesperson said and added that to mark the occasion, a ceremony was held at Allama Iqbal International Airport.

Passengers were seen off by PIA's Chief Executive Officer Air Vice Marshal Aamir Hayat, Chief Operating Officer Khurram Mushtaq, Head of

German consultancy M2P Consulting will now develop technical specifications and tender documents to invite proposals from global e-Gate providers.

The project reflects PAA's vision “to integrate smart technologies into airport operations, ensuring seamless and secure travel experiences,” the spokesman said.

Mission of the French Embassy Franck Aubry, and other senior officials of the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA).

“This flight will further boost aviation, tourism, trade and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries,” he said.

Mr Aubry expressed hope for deeper ties between Pakistan and France through this new air link.

On resumption of the Islamabad-Paris flight in January last, the national flag carrier faced criticism for an advertisement featuring one of their planes flying towards the Eiffel Tower, with many finding the image “insensitive and reminiscent of the 9/11 attacks”.

The ad showing [posted on social media by PIA] a Boeing 777 flying towards the Eiffel Tower with the caption “Paris, we're coming today” even drew ire of the government functionaries. It was deemed a “stupidity” by Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar. The PIA subsequently issued an apology, stating the intention was not to offend or cause alarm.



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Design Finalized for E-Gates at 3 Major Airports

Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) has successfully concluded the design phase of the e-Gates project for Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore international airports, following an intensive three-day series of workshops and consultations



with key stakeholders.

The e-Gates initiative aims to introduce biometric-based automated border control at major airports to significantly enhance passenger facilitation, reduce wait times, and improve security.

The detailed design work, conducted in collaboration with international aviation experts and relevant agencies, sets the foundation for the next phase. Now, German consultancy M2P Consulting, engaged by PAA for technical support, will move forward with the development of comprehensive technical specifications and tender documents to invite proposals from top-tier global e-Gate providers.



Paris Air Show: China gives glimpse of 5th-gen J-35A fighter



China has recently seen a rise in fighter aircraft sales in developing countries, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia.

China has displayed a scale model of its latest fifth-generation fighter jet overseas for the first time as part of its advanced military aircraft line-up at a major air show in Europe.

China National Aero-Technology Import & Export Corporation (CATIC)

displayed a miniature version of the J-35A – the land-based variant of China's latest fifth-generation fighter jet, the J-35 – at the 55th Paris Air Show, the largest and one of the oldest events of its kind in the world.

After more than a decade of development by the Shenyang Aircraft Corporation (SAC), China unveiled the J-35A at the Zhuhai air show in November as China's second fifth-generation fighter jet after the J-20.

Air traffic operations in Pakistan's airspace amid regional tensions

Despite recent regional developments, Pakistan's airspace continues to be

utilized effectively and without disruption. International flights are transiting through Pakistan's airspace as per routine, with no reported obstacles or interruptions.

The increased volume of air traffic is being managed efficiently through a coordinated and professional approach. International overflights are being facilitated smoothly, without delay or restriction.

The Pakistan Airports Authority remains fully committed to ensuring the continuity, safety, and security of all flight operations through effective airspace management and close coordination with relevant stakeholders.

Uzbekistan Airways launches direct flight from Tashkent to Islamabad



The inaugural direct flight of Uzbekistan Airways from Tashkent to Islamabad was warmly received here on Saturday 14 June upon its arrival at Islamabad International Airport. A welcome ceremony marked the historic occasion, attended by prominent dignitaries and officials from both nations.

Among those present were H.E. Mr. Alisher Tukhtaev, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan; Mr. Aftabur Rehman Rana, Managing Director of Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC); Syed Aftab Ali Shah Gilani, Islamabad Airport Manager; Mr. Bakhtiyor Muminov, Country Manager of Uzbekistan Airways; along with diplomats from other Central Asian states and senior officials from Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA), PTDC, and Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

Ambassador Tukhtaev praised the launch of the new direct route, emphasizing its potential to enhance economic and trade ties between Uzbekistan and Pakistan. "This direct air link marks a strategic advancement in bilateral relations and aligns with the broader goals of the Central and South Asia Connectivity Initiatives," he stated.

Mr. Aftabur Rehman Rana, Managing Director of PTDC, lauded the inaugural flight as a "significant step forward in strengthening air connectivity between two brotherly nations." He highlighted

that this long-awaited air route addresses a consistent demand raised at regional forums such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to improve regional connectivity.

"This new route will not only deepen bilateral ties across multiple sectors but also play a pivotal role in boosting regional tourism, fostering people-to-people contact, facilitating business travel, educational exchange, and promoting cultural cooperation," Mr. Rana added.

Emphasizing the tourism potential, he noted that the direct connection will encourage two-way tourism flows. "For Pakistani travelers, Uzbekistan's legendary Silk Road cities — Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva — are now more accessible than ever. Similarly, Uzbek tourists can now explore Pakistan's majestic northern mountains, spiritual heritage sites, and vibrant cultural landmarks with greater ease."

Mr. Rana also pointed out that tourism exchanges between the two countries have steadily increased in recent years due to shared historical ties, cultural heritage, and religious affinity. The new weekly flight provides a reliable and cost-effective travel option for tourists, students, pilgrims, and professionals seeking enriching cross-border experiences.

Uzbekistan Airlines on Saturday flew its inaugural Pakistani route from Islamabad to Tashkent, marking a key moment in connectivity between the two nations, a statement from the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) said.

Uzbekistan announced earlier this year that air routes between Karachi, Samarkand and Bukhara would be launched, describing it as a significant step to foster closer ties between the two nations.

According to a PAA statement, the flight took off at 1:09pm with 126 passengers on board, with Zone 1 of Islamabad International Airport specially adorned with colourful balloons for the milestone.

"The event was graced by the esteemed ambassadors of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan," the statement read, adding that the Chief Operating Officer of Islamabad Airport, the managing director of Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation and the Country Manager of Uzbekistan Airlines also attended.

"Guests warmly welcomed passengers at Stand 3 and a formal cake-cutting ceremony was held in the upper lounge area (A5) to commemorate the launch," the statement added. "The entire event was seamlessly organised with the dedicated support and coordination of airport teams under the Pakistan Airports Authority." In February this year, Pakistan and Uzbekistan agreed to expand bilateral trade to \$2 billion as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Tashkent. **Addressing a joint press conference with PM Shehbaz, President Mirziyoyev said: "We came to the conclusions on different spheres and mutual trade turnover had exceeded \$400 million, and we have plans to increase that to \$2bn."**

He termed the negotiations between them "very fruitful", adding that there was a "new direction" for future goals.



An image of an Uzbekistan Airlines plane.

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After 15 years of waiting, China has finally launched larger than a Boeing 737 aircrafts capable landing on water

After 15 years of development, China has finally launched serial production of the AG600 Kunlong amphibious aircraft. This massive flying machine, larger than a Boeing 737 and capable of landing on water like a duck, represents a significant milestone in Chinese aviation engineering. The aircraft received its production certificate on June 13, 2025, marking the beginning of a new era for this versatile giant.

The colossal amphibious aircraft that dwarfs commercial planes

The AG600 Kunlong stands as the largest amphibious aircraft ever developed in China. With dimensions that exceed those of many commercial aircraft, this water-landing behemoth measures 38.9 meters in length, 11.7 meters in height, and boasts a wingspan of 38.8 meters. Its size rivals that of a Boeing 737, but with crucial modifications that allow it to perform unique operations.

Unlike conventional aircraft, the Kunlong features a boat-like belly and stabilizing floats exceeding 4 meters in length attached to each wing. These design elements prevent capsizing when the aircraft operates on water surfaces. This engineering marvel can take off and land on seas, lakes, and even rivers, making it exceptionally versatile for various operations.

With a maximum takeoff weight reaching 60 tons, the AG600 can carry up to 12 tons of water for firefighting missions across a range of 4,500 kilometers. This capability positions it as a powerful tool in combating large-scale wildfires. China's advancements in aviation technology don't stop with the AG600 – the nation has also unveiled a hypersonic aircraft capable of traveling around the world in just 2 hours, further demonstrating their growing aerospace capabilities.

A 15-year journey to production certification

The development journey of the AG600 began in 2009, marking the start of a 15-year odyssey toward production certification. The project hit several key milestones along the way, including its maiden flight in 2017, followed by successful water reservoir takeoffs in 2018. By 2020, the aircraft completed its first sea-based flight, and in 2023, it demonstrated its effectiveness in combating large-scale fires.

After years of rigorous testing and refinement, the Civil Aviation

Administration of China finally granted AVIC the production certificate for the Kunlong on June 11, 2025. This certification confirms that the manufacturing process, quality control systems, and documentation meet national airworthiness standards. The certificate essentially validates that the production methods are reproducible on a national scale.

The AG600's development process provides valuable experience for future large-scale aviation projects in China. This contrasts with some of China's other ambitious projects, such as an \$86 billion city that now stands mostly empty – the aircraft program appears to have found its purpose and market.

Multiple missions from firefighting to rescue operations

The AG600 Kunlong serves multiple critical functions that leverage its unique amphibious capabilities. Primary among these is firefighting, with the ability to drop 12 tons of water in a single pass. This makes it a powerful asset against the mega-fires that increasingly threaten Asia, Australia, and the Mediterranean basin each summer.

Beyond firefighting, the aircraft integrates into China's natural disaster response network. Its amphibious design proves invaluable during tsunamis, typhoons, and floods, allowing it to land on water to evacuate casualties or deliver essential supplies to otherwise inaccessible areas. This versatility gives the Kunlong strategic importance in

humanitarian operations.

The aircraft's development represents part of a broader push for technological self-sufficiency in China. While transportation technology evolves globally – with some sectors facing challenges like electric vehicles struggling with winter range issues or surprising charging costs – China continues to advance traditional aviation with innovations like the AG600.

Made in China: A collaborative engineering achievement

The AG600 represents a triumph of Chinese engineering collaboration. Entirely designed and assembled within China, the project mobilized over one hundred partner companies to produce tens of thousands of necessary components. This collaborative approach follows what AVIC calls a “small core, large collaboration” model.

Under this framework, a small central team manages core design aspects while manufacturing, system integration, and flight testing are distributed across an extensive network of industrial partners. This approach mirrors strategies employed by aviation giants like Airbus and Boeing with their subcontractors.

Serial production of the AG600 has commenced at AVIC General Huanan Aircraft Industry Co. in Zhuhai, Guangdong Province. Looking ahead, AVIC plans to expand the AG600 family with versions optimized for different applications: firefighting, emergency rescue, maritime surveillance, and potentially logistics transport.

Unlike some technology products that face abrupt discontinuation – such as certain smartphone replacement devices – the AG600 program appears built for longevity. As climate change increases natural disaster frequency, amphibious aircraft like the Kunlong may become essential components of civil security policies throughout Asia and beyond.



After 15 years of development, China has finally launched serial production of the AG600 Kunlong amphibious aircraft. This massive flying machine, larger than a Boeing 737 and capable of landing on water like a duck, represents a significant milestone in Chinese aviation engineering. The aircraft received its production certificate on June 13, 2025, marking the beginning of a new era for this versatile giant.

Etihad Cargo launches SmartTrack, the industry's first real-time smart shipment tracking solution

Etihad Cargo, the cargo and logistics arm of Etihad Airways, has launched SmartTrack, a game-changing premium service that gives customers real-time access to shipment location and condition data, raising the bar for transparency in global air freight. Unveiled at Air Cargo Europe 2025 in Munich, SmartTrack positions Etihad Cargo as the first carrier globally to implement this type of advanced smart tracking solution.

Developed in partnership with Tag-N-Trac, SmartTrack leverages cutting-edge smart label technology to deliver comprehensive end-to-end shipment monitoring. The label is equipped with cellular, GPS, Bluetooth and Wi-Fi connectivity, capturing real-time data on exact location, temperature and humidity, shock, tilt and light exposure. This makes SmartTrack the ideal solution for mission-critical and condition-sensitive cargo, including pharmaceuticals, electronics and high-value goods.

SmartTrack is designed with a focus on both efficiency and sustainability. The smart label, which can remain active for up to 30 days, features minimal packaging and eliminates the need for return logistics.

SmartTrack will be fully integrated into Etihad Cargo's digital platform and mobile app and aims to provide customers with a tailored, intuitive interface featuring live maps, milestone updates and access to full sensor data. This digital

experience is supported by Etihad Cargo's centralised control tower, which delivers 24/7 operational oversight and proactive performance monitoring, ensuring transparency and service excellence at every stage of the journey.

"This launch represents a transformation in how we deliver even more peace of mind to our customers," said Stanislas Brun, Chief Cargo Officer at Etihad Airways. "By combining simplicity, intelligence and automation, we are reinforcing our commitment to smarter, more transparent logistics."

"When Etihad Airways' cargo team asked us if we could deliver an air cargo visibility digital solution in three months, we were up for the challenge. We knew we were setting a new standard in cargo visibility with our smart label-based RELATIVITY platform, empowering Etihad with the information they need, when they need it, across the globe," said VenuGutlapalli, CEO of Tag-N-Trac.

Following extensive field testing across major global trade lanes, the SmartTrack label has demonstrated consistent, high-accuracy performance across both air and ground transport.

SmartTrack will be available to customers via the Etihad Cargo website and mobile app from October 2025, as part of the airline's broader digital transformation strategy focused on innovation, operational excellence and exceeding evolving customer expectations.

Airbus more than doubles A220 output in June



A220 final Assembly line in Mirabel, Canada

Airbus managed to accelerate A220 deliveries significantly in June as the manufacturer handed over a total of 63 aircraft in the month.

The company delivered 12 A220s in June, up from just five a month earlier. Since January, customers have accepted 41 A220s. The accelerated pace is welcome news for Airbus as the manufacturer targets a rate of 14 aircraft by 2026 for its smallest narrowbody.

Deliveries of the A320neo family were split almost evenly between the A321neo (23) and the A320 (20), which has recently been outpaced by the larger variant. The total of 43 aircraft represents a relatively low level of output, held back by a shortage of CFM International Leap-1A engines.

Widebodies, too, were moving slowly, with only two A330-900s delivered to Malaysia Airlines and Kuwait Airways, respectively. Airbus handed over five A350-900s—to Emirates, Air France, Lufthansa, Delta Air Lines and Sichuan Airlines.

Since the beginning of the year, Airbus has handed over 306 aircraft to 65 customers. It is targeting around 820 for the full year, up from 766 in 2024.

The company recorded 203 gross orders in June. For a change, the A330-900 was its bestselling aircraft (61 orders) followed by the A320neo family (57) the A220 (40) and the A350 (35).





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China's C929 jet secures Western tech as manufacturer



Though supply chains and trade relations have been strained, China's in-development widebody plane will feature components from Western firms.

China's chief civilian aircraft maker has secured deals to buy Western-made parts for its first widebody jet – expected to resemble the Airbus A350 and Boeing 787 series – despite ongoing turbulence in trade and supply chains.

The Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (Comac) reached an agreement to work with French aerospace firm Safran on the development of the brake controls, ice detection system, tyre pressure indicators and on-board oxygen system, according to reports from Chinese media outlets recently.

Comac said on its website it had signed a “memorandum of understanding” with Safran during Paris Air Show.

Chinese firm to set up electric vehicle assembly plant in Punjab

Punjab Industries & Commerce Department and Skywell New Energy Vehicles Group of China Wednesday 18 June signed memorandum of understanding (MoU) for a major investment in electric vehicles sector.

As per the agreement, the Chinese group will set up an electric vehicle



assembly plant on an area of 75 acres in the Special Economic Zone of Punjab.

Provincial Minister for Industries Chaudhry Shafay Hussain, and the Chinese company's CEO Biwan Han signed the MoU at a ceremony held at Punjab Small Industries Corporation (PSIC) Office.

The Chinese group has expressed keen interest in investing in the business of electric buses, cars, two-wheelers, three-wheelers and other electric vehicles.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister welcomed the investment in the electric vehicles sector. He said the government would provide all possible support to the Chinese investors to set up electric vehicles plant in Punjab. The Punjab government under the leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif is taking prompt measures to promote the EV sector, he added.

He highlighted that the promotion of environmentally friendly transport sector in the province is a priority of the Punjab government. “We are providing all possible facilities to those who invest in e-products, batteries, charging stations and electric vehicles,” he said.

The minister reaffirmed the commitment of Punjab government to promote industrialization along with bringing new investment in the province. He added that setting up new industries in Punjab will create new employment opportunities for the people.

Hussain underscored that foreign investors including China would be given foolproof security in Punjab, adding that

domestic and foreign investors are being provided with the best possible security facilities. He said that owing to the favorable environment, new investments are coming rapidly in the province.

CEO Skywell New Energy Vehicles Group said, “Our group will manufacture electric vehicles for export purposes along with providing to the local market.”

FFCL submits EoI for PIA purchase

The board of directors of Fauji Fertiliser Company Ltd (FFCL) has approved the submission of an expression of interest (EoI) and pre-qualification documents to the Privatisation Commission for acquiring stakes in Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Ltd, along with a comprehensive due diligence process.

FFCL shared this development in a stock filing on Monday 16 June.

The 234th board meeting of FFCL was held on June 13, at which the decision to acquire PIA shares was taken.

The government last month extended the deadline to submit EoI for buying PIACL until June 19 from June 3 deadline with all terms and conditions remaining the same.

In a surprising turn of events, the People's Unity of Pakistan International Airlines employees' union, which had previously opposed the privatisation of PIA, has now submitted a bid to the Privatisation Commission to acquire shares of PIA and gain management control.

While submitting the EoI, the joint letter, signed by the central president of People's Unity of PIA Employees, Hedayat Ullah, and president of PIA Senior Staff Association of PIA, states that “our intention is supported by our experience of decades, knowledge of industry practices and allied factors.”



Pakistan joins world in mourning plane crash victims

Leaders joined the rest of the world on Thursday 12 June in expressing condolences for the victims after a London-bound Air India flight crashed shortly after taking off from Ahmedabad.

"The tragedy in Ahmedabad has stunned and saddened us," Indian PM Narendra Modi posted on X. "In this sad hour, my thoughts are with everyone affected by it. Have been in touch with Ministers and authorities who are working to assist those affected."

The disaster prompted an immediate wave of sympathy from allies and adversaries alike, all expressing solidarity with the victims' families and the Indian people.

Leaders from across Pakistan's political spectrum set aside longstanding tensions to offer support.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said he was saddened by the news. "We extend our condolences to the families of the victims grieving this immense loss," he wrote in a post on social media platform X. "Our thoughts and prayers are with all those affected by this heartbreaking tragedy."

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar also expressed his condolences over the loss of precious lives. "Saddened at the crash of Air India flight in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Condolences over the loss of precious lives in this tragic incident," he wrote on X, extending his sympathies with the families of the victims in this hour of grief.

Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari also shared his grief on social media. "Saddened to hear a tragic incident occurred earlier today," the former foreign minister posted. "I express my profound condolences to the people of India."

Expressing his grief over the tragic incident, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Defence Khawaja Asif said, "We are deeply saddened by the tragic crash of #AirIndia Flight AI171 near Ahmedabad today. Our heartfelt condolences go out to the families and loved ones of all aboard. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those affected"

Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif described the crash as a "devastating loss that transcends borders and reminds us of our shared humanity," offering his deepest sympathies to Prime Minister Modi and the Indian people.

World offers solidarity

The shock was particularly acute in London, the flight's intended destination. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer called the news "devastating", noting the plane was "carrying many British nationals."

Britain's King Charles issued a message on X, saying, "My wife and I have been desperately shocked by the terrible events... Our special prayers and deepest possible sympathy are with the families and friends of all those affected."

From across Europe, messages of support poured in. The Vatican released a telegram message in which Pope Leo XIV expressed his "heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of those who have lost their lives".

European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen told Modi, "Europe stands in solidarity with you and the people of India".

French President Emmanuel Macron also extended his nation's "heartfelt thoughts to the victims' loved ones".

Russian President Vladimir Putin offered his "deep condolences on the tragic consequences" and asked that "words of sincere sympathy and support" be conveyed to the families of the victims.

From Washington, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio offered his prayers in a post on X. "Heartbroken to hear the news of a tragic plane crash in Ahmedabad, India. My prayers are with all who lost their loved ones in this horrible incident."

Leaders of other countries also reacted with shock. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said he was "devastated" to learn of the crash, which included one Canadian citizen.

In Australia, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called the news "absolutely devastating."

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni used X to convey solidarity with the Indian people. "On behalf of the Italian Government and myself, I express sincere condolences to the victims' families and stand with the Indian people in this moment of great sorrow."

Neighbouring countries and other partners also expressed their sorrow.

Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said, "We stand in solidarity with the people and Government of India, and offer our full support in any form."

From Dublin, Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin said, "My thoughts and

prayers are with the people of India after the terrible plane crash... Thinking of the families of all those on board."

Air India flight faces 'worst disaster in a decade'



Debris of Air India flight 171 is pictured after it crashed in a residential area near the airport in Ahmedabad on June 13, 2025

More than 200 people were killed when an Air India plane bound for London with 242 people on board crashed shortly after takeoff, authorities said in what is said to be the world's worst aviation disaster in a decade.

Only one person is known to have survived, as the plane came down in a residential area, crashing onto a medical college hostel just outside the airport at lunchtime.

The passengers included 169 Indian nationals, 53 British, seven Portuguese, and a Canadian. Two pilots and 10 cabin crew were also aboard, according to media.



Another photo shows a man walks past debris of the Air India aircraft, lodged in a residential building near the Ahmedabad airport.

Paris shuts Israeli booths at air show

Geopolitical tensions roiled the opening of the Paris Air Show on Monday 16 June as French authorities sealed off Israeli weapons industry booths amid the conflicts in Iran and Gaza, a move that Israel condemned as “outrageous”.

The decision added drama to the major aerospace industry event, which was already under the shadow of deadly crash of Air India's Boeing 787 Dreamliner.

Black walls were installed around the stands of five Israeli defence firms at the trade fair in Le Bourget, an airfield on the outskirts of Paris.

The booths displayed “offensive weapons” that could be used in Gaza — in violation of agreements with Israeli authorities, a French government source said. The French government has not given its exact definition of “offensive” or attack weapons.

The companies — Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), Rafael, Uvision, Elbit and Aeronautics — make drones and guided bombs and missiles. An Israeli exhibitor wrote a message in yellow chalk on one of the walls, saying the hidden defence systems “are protecting the state of Israel these days. The French government, in the name of discrimination is trying to hide them from you!” French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou defended the decision during a press conference at the air show.

“The French government's position was very simple: no offensive weapons at the arms exposition,” he said. “Defensive weapons were perfectly acceptable.” Bayrou cited the ongoing conflict in Gaza as the rationale behind the ban.

“Given the situation in Gaza... which is extremely serious from a humanitarian and security point of view, France was keen to make it clear that offensive weapons should not be present at this exposition,” Bayrou said. Israeli President Isaac Herzog said he was shocked by the “outrageous” closure of the pavilions and said the situation should be “immediately corrected”.

“Israeli companies have signed contracts with the organisers... it's like creating an Israeli ghetto,” he said on French television channel LCI.

Defence opportunity could finally make flying taxis a reality



A Wisk Generation 6 autonomous eVTOL prototype aircraft at the 55th International Paris Airshow at Le Bourget Airport near Paris, France, June 18.

Opportunities in defence, emergency healthcare and cargo could help make flying taxis a reality in the next few years after the sector recently received backing from the Trump administration, executives in the industry said at the Paris Airshow.

President Donald Trump this month told regulators to speed up certification to accelerate the development of electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft (eVTOLs), aiming to secure a US lead over Asia in the technology. The executive order gave fresh impetus to an industry that has struggled to win over critics and regulators.

“We take a lot of spears, people are like ‘batteries are too heavy,’” said Kyle Clark, founder and chief executive of BETA Technologies, at the show. “But the reality is, if you put the airplanes in the right places, the benefits are real.” Flying taxis — seen in predictions of the future for decades — need to shake off the idea that they are just for the rich to become viable at scale.

Their manufacturers say emergency medical services, cargo and defence could help, where they offer a cheaper and quieter alternative to helicopters in areas from passenger and goods transport to rescue missions.

BETA, Joby Aviation and Archer Aviation are in the US Air Force Agility Prime Program, which aims to develop technologies for autonomous cargo and hybrid-electric aircraft. Joby and Archer have previously signed military contracts worth \$131 million and up to \$142 million, respectively.

“We have two aircraft at Edwards Air Force Base, and we are really grateful for all the support and all the learning we've gotten out of that,” Joby Aviation's founder and chief executive Joe Ben Bevirt said. “We think there's incredible opportunities on the defence side.” BETA's Clark, who flew its conventional takeoff

and landing aircraft in Paris, said the company had a clear position in defence: reliable aircraft that showed up to every mission. “We've gone to somewhere near 10 bases,” he said. “We've done 1,000s of takeoffs and landings with the military, we've had an exceptional dispatch rate.

“We didn't just dabble in there. We've got contracts. I think that, like, we've got hundreds of millions of dollars of actual, tangible dollars flowing into us with defence.” The three companies, along with Wisk Aero, said Trump's order was a big deal in boosting the sector's prospects.

US Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy and acting FAA Administrator Chris Rocheleau announced a US-led alliance with Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to streamline the certification of eVTOLs globally at the Paris show on Tuesday. Wisk Aero, owned by Boeing, differs from its rivals in that it is focused on launching fully automated services. “We have the political support, we have the industry support and then we have the money to make it happen,” CEO Sebastien Vigneron said.

Public concern over automated driving systems in cars suggests fully automated flying could have some convincing to do to gain wider acceptance. BETA's Clark said once the aircraft were in the hands of customers, the business case would be clear. He said he had flown passengers from the Hamptons to JFK airport in New York using only \$7 of electricity.

“You basically flip opex and capex on its head for recurring costs, and it just tells you what type of customers and applications you want for these airplanes,” he said.

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Vietravel Airlines signs five-year renewal of Radixx Passenger Service System with Sabre



Vietravel Airlines has renewed its Passenger Service System (PSS) agreement with **Sabre Corporation** (NASDAQ: SABR), a leading global travel technology company, for another five years – underscoring the airline's confidence in Sabre's Radixx platform as a key enabler for growth.

Vietravel Airlines constitutes an integral component of the aviation and logistics ecosystem of T&T Group. This integration was solidified in December 2024 when T&T Group became a strategic shareholder of Vietravel Airlines, positioning T&T as the first conglomerate in Vietnam to possess both airport and airline assets concurrently. T&T Group is currently developing a comprehensive investment strategy to realize its objective of establishing Vietravel Airlines as a leading regional carrier, with a dual focus on expanding passenger transport and pioneering the development of air cargo services.

“Extending our partnership with Sabre is an important step as we move into the next phase of our journey,” said **Vu Dao Duc, CEO, Vietravel Airlines**. “The Radixx platform has equipped us for scale, while enhancing the service experience for our passengers. As we continue to grow, we're confident Sabre's

technology will continue to power our ambitions.”

Sabre's Radixx PSS offers end-to-end retailing, passenger servicing, and operational capabilities. Vietravel Airlines will continue to use a comprehensive suite of Sabre's advanced Radixx technology, including:

Radixx Res® – for core passenger services and retailing capabilities,

RadixxEzyCommerce® – for a seamless, omni-channel digital experience,

Radixx Go® – for efficient airport and departure control operations, and

Radixx Insight® – for actionable analytics and decision-making support.

The technology allows Vietravel Airlines the option to add further loyalty and data capabilities as well as providing access to new markets through Global Distribution System (GDS) channels and interline/codeshare agreements with airline partners, bringing additional revenue opportunities. Vietravel Airlines also recently integrated Sabre's Payment Gateway into its Radixx PSS solution, enhancing its payment methods and providing a more flexible and diverse range of payment options for customers.

“This renewal is a testament to the strength and value of the Radixx platform,” said NicoStoman, Head of Radixx Sales and Account Management, Sabre. “We're proud to continue to support Vietravel Airlines with powerful, retail-driven solutions that scale with their ambitions. This agreement reflects their commitment to digital innovation and underscores Sabre's role in enabling next-generation carriers to deliver more dynamic, customer-focused experiences.”

Pakistan included in codeshare agreement between Virgin Atlantic and Saudia.



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Process begins to name advisers for four power companies, two plants



Pakistan International Airlines aircraft on the runway at Sialkot International Airport.

Privatisation Commission has taken significant steps in advancing its reform agenda by initiating the process for the appointment of financial advisers for four power distribution companies and two power generation plants, while also receiving expressions of interest (EoIs) from eight parties seeking management control of Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Ltd (PIACL).

These developments mark a major push to accelerate privatisation in key sectors, with the commission aiming to enhance private sector participation, improve efficiency, and reduce the government's financial burden.

At its meeting, the Board of the Privatisation Commission approved the process to appoint financial advisers for four power distribution companies — Hyderabad Electric Supply Company (Hesco), Sukkur Electric Power Company (Sepco), Peshawar Electric Supply Company (Pesco), and Hazara Electric Supply Company (Hazeco) — all of which are slated for privatisation in the second phase. Financial advisers will also be appointed for two power generation plants: the 747MW Guddu Power Plant and the 525MW Nandipur Power Plant.

The board meeting, chaired by Adviser to the Prime Minister on Privatisation Muhammad Ali, also reviewed ongoing transactions. Financial advisers for three other distribution companies — Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (Fesco), Gujranwala Electric Power Company (Gepco), and Islamabad Electric Supply Company (Iesco) — have already been appointed and these companies are part of the first phase of privatisation.

PIA attracts five potential buyers

The board further examined the status of the Roosevelt Hotel in New York,

another strategic asset under consideration.

Expressions of interest

Regarding PIACL, the deadline for submitting EoIs and statements of qualification (SOQs) expired for acquiring management control of the national carrier, with a stake ranging from 51 to 100pc of its share capital. This is the second attempt to privatise the airline, with the submission deadline previously extended from June 3.

Eight interested parties submitted EoIs, and five of them submitted SOQs by the deadline. These include consortia comprising Lucky Cement Ltd, Hub Power Holdings Ltd, Kohat Cement Company Ltd, and Metro Ventures (Pvt) Ltd; Arif Habib Corporation Ltd and Fatima Fertiliser Company Ltd; City Schools (Pvt) Ltd and Lake City Holdings (Pvt) Ltd; Air Blue Ltd; and a consortium of Augment Securities & Investments (Pvt) Ltd and Serene Air (Pvt) Ltd, joined by Bahria Foundation, Mega C&S Holding, and Equitas Capital LLC. Other parties expressing interest include the AKD Group, Fauji Fertiliser Company Ltd, Habib Rafique Engineering (Pvt) Ltd, and Sardar Muhammad Ashraf D. Baloch (Pvt) Ltd.

The submitted SOQs will now be evaluated by the commission according to its prequalification criteria. Prequalified parties will proceed to the next phase, where they will be granted access to the virtual data room for buy-side due diligence.

In addition to these developments, the board also approved the audited financial statements of the Privatisation Commission for 2022-23 and 2023-24, as well as budget estimates for 2025-26 to support the commission's operations and ongoing transactions.

Sabre appoints Maneesh Jaikrishna to lead airline IT business across Asia Pacific



Announced the appointment of Maneesh Jaikrishna as Vice President and General Manager, Airline IT Solutions, Asia Pacific. With nearly three decades of leadership experience in the

airline and travel technology industry, Maneesh brings deep knowledge of the Asia Pacific aviation landscape, having worked extensively across this fast-evolving region. His appointment reflects Sabre's strong commitment to accelerating growth and innovation in Asia Pacific—a key strategic market for the company. Maneesh also brings a valuable wider perspective, having led operations across the Middle East and Africa.

Maneesh is a respected thought leader in the travel and transport technology space, known for championing collaboration, digital transformation, and customer excellence. He has held senior leadership roles at companies including SITA and, most recently, biometrics business Vision-Box — leading high-growth initiatives and building strong customer ecosystems by aligning technology and innovation with commercial value. He is recognized as a people-centric, strategic leader who delivers results and builds long-term value.

In his new role, Maneesh will lead Sabre's airline technology business across Asia Pacific, focusing on strategic growth, deepening customer engagement, and market expansion. He will drive adoption of Sabre's innovative portfolio of airline IT solutions that empower carriers to modernize retailing, boost ancillary revenues, and improve operations through intelligent, data-driven decision-making.

“Maneesh joins Sabre at a pivotal time for the aviation industry,” said Darren Rickey, Senior Vice President, Commercial and Services, Airline IT, Sabre. “His deep regional expertise, customer focus, leadership experience and passion for innovation will play a key role in helping our airline partners across Asia Pacific transform their operations and deliver better outcomes for travellers and businesses alike.”

“I am honoured to take on this role and lead Sabre's airline business in Asia Pacific,” Maneesh Jaikrishna said. “The region represents a powerful combination of growth, innovation, and diversity. I look forward to working closely with our customers and partners to help them thrive in a rapidly evolving travel landscape.”

NEWS IN PICTURES



PIA and Air Karachi get into a partnership for the provisioning of MRO Services for the fleet of Air Karachi. PIA remains steadfast in promoting and strengthening the aviation sector of Pakistan. Agreement is signed between CEO PIA AVM Amir Hayat and Chairman Air Karachi Mr. Hanif Gohar in Karachi on June 11, 2025.



Turkish Airlines officials visit Sialkot International Airport to discuss potential commencement of Turkish Airlines operations from Sialkot in the near future. Photo shows Mr. Sertan Yuce GM Karachi Turkish Airline presenting a model of an aircraft to Mr. Hassan Ali Bhatti Chairman SIAL, Vice Air Marshal (R) Tanweer Ashraf Bhatti CEO SIAL also present on the occasion.



Airblue celebrates 21st anniversary.



Uzbekistan Airways starts flight from Islamabad to Tashkent.

Geo Cargo Alliance (GCA), an independent Freight forwarders' network, designed to connect Freight forwarders from around the globe for collaboration and business opportunities within the Logistics industry, held its 1st Annual Conference 2025 at Shangri-La Bangkok on June 27-29, 2025. The photo taken on the occasion shows Mr. Amjad Fakhri, CEO of SFI Logistics (Sialkot), participating in the conference.



AirSial launches flights from Islamabad to Dubai

Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) successfully facilitated and supervised the launch of AirSial's inaugural international flight (PF784) from Islamabad International Airport (IIAP) to Dubai. The flight departed at 1134 hours with 137 passengers on board, marking a significant milestone in Pakistan's private aviation sector.

To commemorate this achievement, a formal launch ceremony was held at Check-in Zone 1 (Business Class Area) of Islamabad International Airport. The Honourable Defence Minister, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. He was accompanied by Defence Secretary Lt. Gen. Muhammad Ali HI (M), Director General of Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority Mr. Nadir Shafi Dar, Chief Operating Officer/Airport Manager Mr. Aftab Gilani, and CEO AirSial Mr. Amin Ahsan.

Pakistan Airports Authority continues to provide world-class infrastructure and services, enabling airlines to expand their international reach while ensuring comfort, safety, and seamless travel experiences for passengers across the country.



Mr. Amin Ahsan CEO AirSial presents bouquet to the Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif on the occasion of launching AirSial flights from Islamabad to Dubai recently.



Gwadar Port: govt announces new shipping lines, ferry service to GCC

The Ministry of Maritime Affairs recently unveiled a strategic plan to expand Gwadar Port's operational capacity by introducing new shipping lines and launching a ferry service connecting Pakistan with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

The announcement was made during a high-level meeting chaired by Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry, in Islamabad, read a statement.

"The initiative is part of the government's broader strategy to enhance regional connectivity, boost maritime trade, and position Gwadar as a major hub in the Arabian Sea," said Chaudhry.

"We aim to transform Gwadar into a strategic transshipment and logistics centre, benefiting Pakistan and the wider region."

Located in Balochistan, Gwadar Port is a strategically important deep-sea port and a key component of the China-

Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a massive infrastructure project aimed at boosting regional trade and connectivity.

During the meeting, the maritime minister recently emphasised that with Gwadar Port now fully operational, it is time to accelerate its integration into international maritime networks. He directed relevant departments to pursue all necessary steps to increase the port's commercial activity and unlock its full potential.

Chaudhry said additional shipping lines will be connected to Gwadar to facilitate greater movement of goods, promote transit trade with Central Asia and the Middle East, and support Pakistan's growing role in the regional logistics landscape.

"The new routes will reduce pressure on existing ports and ensure faster, more efficient cargo handling", he said.

In addition to enhancing cargo operations, the government has also planned to launch a ferry service from Gwadar to GCC countries.

The move is expected to provide an affordable, direct maritime link for passengers and cargo, and will particularly benefit expatriate communities and cross-border traders.

"The ferry service will strengthen people-to-people ties, boost tourism, and provide a new economic lifeline for Balochistan," Chaudhry said.

"It will create local employment, improve supporting infrastructure, and attract private sector participation, especially in the areas of ship services, hospitality, and transportation."

PM seeks Turkish participation in running Gwadar Port

Moreover, the maritime ministry has initiated consultations with shipping companies, maritime authorities, and port operators to finalise technical, legal, and logistical frameworks for both the new shipping lines and the ferry service.

The minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to fully harness the strategic importance of Gwadar.





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Careem ends ride-hailing service from next month

Careem will suspend its ride-hailing service operations in Pakistan from July 18 after nearly a decade in the industry, its CEO announced on Wednesday 16 July adding that its journey in the country would continue “in a different role”, reported media.

Mudassir Sheikh, Careem's CEO and co-founder, shared a post on LinkedIn announcing “a new chapter” for the company. “It is with a heavy heart that I share this update: Careem will suspend its ride-hailing service in Pakistan on July 18,” Sheikh said, adding that it was “an incredibly difficult decision.”

“The challenging macroeconomic reality, intensifying competition, and global capital allocation made it hard to justify the investment levels required to deliver a safe and dependable service in the country. “In the end, the Careem Rides team had to make this tough call,” he said.

Careem's exit came as newer entrants such as Russia-backed Yango and Latin America's inDrive have expanded in major cities, offering low-cost models, Reuters said.

Sheikh called the ride suspension “the end of an iconic chapter — one built with purpose, grit and a ton of relentless hustle”. He highlighted some of Careem's notable achievements while operating in Pakistan, including safe rides on demand, women travelling with strangers, and smartphones and digital payments for everyday use.

“The challenges were real and formidable. But our Pakistan team was brilliant and fearless — bold, determined, and literally on a mission to create millions of jobs for captains across the country,” he said. He lauded his team for building a service that millions of Pakistanis relied on “to move and earn”.

“They delivered significant public goods: digital infrastructure, trust, regulation, capability, confidence — all of which paved the way for countless local and global digital ventures to take root in Pakistan.”

He added that “while ride-hailing is sunset, Careem's journey in Pakistan continues in a different role. “Careem Technologies (the spinout building the Everything App) will continue to build from Pakistan for the region.”

Sheikh said that nearly 400 Careem employees from across all functions, including engineering, are building the Everything App and its ecosystem of verticals (food/grocery delivery, payments, and more). “This presence is

only set to grow, with over 100 open roles and the expansion of our Falcon/NextGen programme that brings in top graduates from Pakistani universities and gives them hands-on training on building highly scalable systems,” he said.

The company said Careem Care will be available till Sept 18 to help users with any pending issues or questions.

In April 2024, Uber made the decision to cease operating its ride-hailing app in Pakistan, saying: “Our subsidiary brand Careem will continue to operate, with the Careem app offering ride-hailing services across Pakistan and earning opportunities for drivers.”

Pakistan's startup ecosystem has come under pressure since 2022 as venture funding dried up, inflation surged to a record 38 per cent before falling to 3.5pc, and consumption weakened. Startups including Airlift, Swvl, VavaCars and Truckitin have shut down or scaled back.

Aptma seeks review of export scheme

Textile industry has sought urgent removal of yarn and fabric from Export Facilitation Scheme (EFS) import scheme in budget FY26 to save the domestic textile value-added chain from complete collapse.

“Subjecting local supplies to 18 per cent sales tax while bestowing zero-rated on imports is an anti-Pakistan policy that is bleeding the economy within,” Aptma Central Chairman Kamran Arshad, Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) Vice Chairman Mahesh Kumar and Karachi Cotton Association (KCA) Chairman Khawaja Mohammad Zubair told a joint press conference at Aptma House on Tuesday 3 June.

The government in budget FY25 removed sales tax exemption on local inputs under EFS making imports sales tax and duty-free.

However, the 18pc sales tax on local inputs is refundable, but refunds have been delayed, especially disadvantaged SMEs.

Only 60-70 cent of refunds are issued while the rest are stuck in manual processing with no progress in the last four to five years, they claimed.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PHMEA) has strongly reacted to the misconception created by Aptma about EFS 2021 and its irrational anti-export demand to impose sales tax on import-stage in EFS which will sabotage the export and industry.

Exports to Europe swell to \$7.5bn

Pakistan's exports to European countries grew 8.62 per cent in the 10 months of the current fiscal year from a year ago, mainly due to higher shipments to western and southern states.

In absolute terms, Pakistan's exports to the European Union (EU) reached \$7.553 billion in July-April FY25 from \$6.954bn last year due to a slight increase in demand for textile and clothing products in western, eastern and northern Europe, according to data compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan.

In FY24, Pakistan's exports to the EU decreased by 3.12pc to \$8.24bn, despite holding the GSP+ status, which allows duty-free entry into most European countries.

Western Europe, comprising countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, and Belgium, accounts for the largest share of Pakistan's exports to the EU. Exports to this region increased by 10.04pc to \$3.791bn in 10MFY25, up from \$3.445bn a year ago.

There is also a slight increase in exports to eastern and northern Europe. Exports to the north of Europe saw a rise of 17.39pc to \$620.63m in 10MFY25, up from \$528.66m in the corresponding months last year.

Exports to southern Europe grew 3.62pc to \$2.552bn in 10MFY25 from \$2.463bn in the corresponding period last year.

In this region, exports to Spain rose 2.75pc to \$1.232bn from \$1.199bn in 10MFY24.

Exports to Italy increased 1.62pc to \$934.04m in 10MFY25 compared to \$918.09m in the same period last year. Exports to Greece increased 12.81pc to \$123.05m against \$109.07m in 10MFY24.

However, exports to eastern Europe grew 13.96pc to \$590.02m from \$517.74m in the corresponding period last year.

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Pakistan-made Fifa 2025 ball receives global acclaim



The Fifa Club World Cup 25 Pro Ball, unveiled by Adidas, can be seen in this undated image.

Sam Handy, Adidas' general manager for football, describes ball as culmination of 18 months of meticulous development.

As the Fifa Club World Cup 2025 kicks off in the United States recently, all eyes aren't just on the competing teams but also on a crucial piece of equipment: the official match ball.

Unveiled earlier this year by Adidas, the Fifa Club World Cup 25 Pro Ball is garnering significant attention not only for its striking stars-and-stripes design but also for its remarkable performance, advanced engineering, and notably, its "Made in Pakistan" label.

Sam Handy, Adidas' general manager for football, described the ball as the culmination of 18 months of meticulous development. The aim, he stated, was to create something "bold, loud, iconic—and unmistakably American."

However, behind its patriotic aesthetic lies a testament to Pakistan's manufacturing excellence and high-performance engineering, with the ball proudly produced in the South Asian nation.

Beyond its origins, the 2025 Club World Cup ball also marks a step towards greater sustainability as it is crafted entirely from polyurethane, this iteration is composed of 61% polyurethane, 30% recycled polyester, and 9% viscose, unlike previous versions.

It also features Adidas' innovative PRECISIONSHELL technology — a 20-panel, thermally bonded structure with strategically placed debossed grooves designed to improve airflow control and enhance flight consistency.

This construction is carried out in Pakistan, where the majority of the world's

footballs are manufactured.

Testing conducted at Loughborough University, a leading sports research institution in the UK, demonstrated the ball's superior performance.

Using both human players and a robotic kicker, researchers compared the new Adidas model with balls from the Premier League (Nike Flight), Carabao Cup (Puma Orbita 1), and FA Cup (MitreUltimax Pro).

While robot testing showed similar speed and spin across all models, player testing revealed "noticeable differences," according to Professor Andy Harland, who oversaw the analysis.

Players achieved their fastest strikes and higher spin rates with the Club World Cup ball—one even recorded more than double the spin compared to the Nike ball. One player remarked the ball "hits truer for professionals," suggesting its design caters well to high-level, precision-based play.

Players observed that the ball felt firmer and had a smaller sweet spot, demanding more precise contact. However, they appreciated its consistency during open play, particularly for delivering long, accurate ground passes.

Despite the limited sample size, all three players registered their fastest strikes using the Club World Cup ball. "It hits truer for the professionals," one player remarked afterward.

"You had to hit it more precisely," the players noted, highlighting that the Club World Cup ball has a smaller 'sweet spot' compared to others.

In contrast, robot testing—which Harland explained "should give a near-identical kick each time" due to the

"fixed" leg speed and ball placement—did not show the Club World Cup ball as the fastest.

The players also described the distinct feel when striking the ball: "Especially the Adidas (Club World Cup) ball, that felt rock-hard," one player said. "It has no grip. Because you have the little grooves, you spin it more," another added.

Two players shared a similar verdict on where it excels: "Probably better in open play. It would be good to hit a long pass with, a grasscutter (a long pass, kept low to the floor) would be perfect."

All the balls were manufactured in Pakistan, which produces the majority of the world's footballs. The distinct construction of the Club World Cup edition is the reason players notice such differences when kicking it.

According to Adidas, the high-grade butyl bladder inside the ball contributes to shape retention and flight stability. The company is so confident in the durability that it offers a two-year shape guarantee.

The ball also includes a motion sensor, sending data 500 times per second to aid in semi-automated offside decisions, player tracking, and touch-point identification—demonstrating the merging of sport and smart technology.

This isn't Adidas' first foray into high-tech footballs, but the Club World Cup 25 Pro Ball represents a significant evolution from past models like the Fevertova from the 2003 Women's World Cup and the Questra from the 1994 tournament.

Back then, balls were hand-stitched and made from multiple materials. Since 2004, Adidas has shifted to thermal bonding, with the new panel designs now allowing for unprecedented aerodynamic precision.

According to Loughborough testing lead Ieuan Williams, ball design has evolved to a point where aerodynamics take precedence over symmetry.

"People started to go, 'Well, these don't have to be regular shapes any longer. We can do crazy things with panels'," he says. "There's been a bit of a readjustment, and now we need to make sure that the ball flies properly again, which has made a load of investment in that."

Ultimately, Adidas has broken from the tradition of simply repainting an existing model. The Club World Cup ball isn't just a visual upgrade—it's a technical overhaul, built for modern football.

With 63 matches on the horizon, the ball's real-world performance will be under close scrutiny. But so far, early signs suggest that this Pakistani-made marvel is ready to deliver on the biggest stage.

Botafogo and Inter Miami end European dominance at Club World Cup

Thirteen years of European dominance in intercontinental club football came to an end on Thursday 19 June as US side Inter Miami defeated Porto 2-1 and Brazilians Botafogo beat Champions League winners Paris St Germain 1-0 at the revamped Club World Cup.

Lionel Messi's stunning free kick secured victory for Inter Miami after they came back from a goal down against the Portuguese side, while South American champions Botafogo delivered a disciplined display to outmanoeuvre PSG. The results marked a seismic shift in a competition historically dominated by European sides, with the last non-European victory coming in 2012 when Brazil's Corinthians defeated Chelsea in the Club World Cup final.

Botafogo's triumph at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena was particularly striking.

The Brazilian champions entered the tournament with ample preparation time, arriving in the United States weeks in advance and conducting an intensive training camp in Los Angeles.

This stood in stark contrast to their gruelling schedule in December, when they had to play the final round of the Brazilian league before travelling to Qatar at the Intercontinental Cup with less than 72 hours to recover.

Against PSG, Botafogo delivered a tactical masterclass.

Their compact defensive formation frustrated the French champions, who enjoyed the lions share of possession but struggled to create clear-cut chances.

"The football graveyard is full of so-called favourites," said Botafogo's Portuguese coach Renato Paiva.

His sides discipline and composure were evident throughout as they nullified PSG's attacking threats and capitalised on a rare opportunity to secure the win, netting the winner in a quick counter led by forward Igor Jesus in the 36th minute.

The result threw Group 'B' wide open and deflated the mood in the PSG camp after their emphatic 4-0 win over Atletico Madrid in their opener.

Desire Doue, who scored twice in PSG's 5-0 demolition of Inter Milan in the Champions League final last month, said failing to take their chances had cost them.

"We weren't efficient," the attacking midfielder said. "We had a lot of chances. They only had two or three shots and they scored. They were very efficient in front of our goal."



ATLANTA: Lionel Messi of Inter Miami shoots to score during the Club World Cup match against Porto at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

Coach Luis Enrique did not look for excuses and praised the Copa Libertadores champions for their approach.

"Botafogo were the best defensive side we've come up against all season both in our league and in the Champions League. They were excellent," the Spaniard said.

"They were simply highly efficient, very compact, and always had the threat of hitting us in transition. They scored a great goal through Jesus, and that gave them a real injection of belief.

"We didn't create the number of chances we're used to. We're very accustomed to working against teams defending deep but it's always difficult to break one down. In this case, Botafogo did it very well, and I congratulate them for it."

Atletico bounced back from their loss to PSG as Diego Simeone's side beat Seattle Sounders 3-1.

Pablo Barrios scored twice, including an 11th-minute opener which crashed in off the underside of the crossbar.

Belgian Axel Witsel came off the bench at half time and almost immediately made it 2-0, nodding in from close range after a Marcos Llorente shot was tipped onto the woodwork.

Albert Rusnak quickly pulled one back for Seattle, only for Barrios to score again for 3-1.

Botafogo top Group 'B' with six points, firmly on course for the last 16, with a final group game against Atletico to come in Pasadena on Monday.

PSG, who face Seattle in their final group game, and Atletico each have three points.

Seattle are facing probable elimination after two defeats but Luis Enrique did not expect things to get any easier for his side.

"This Club World Cup is very intense and difficult and all the teams are highly motivated, especially when they're

playing against us," he added.

MESSIMAGIC

Earlier in the day, Inter Miami showcased resilience against Porto in Atlanta.

After falling behind they rallied through Messi's brilliance, with the Argentine great curling a sensational free kick into the top corner to seal the comeback as the Major League Soccer side bounced back from their disappointing goalless draw against Egyptian side Al Ahly in their opening match.

Despite Porto enduring one of their poorest seasons in years, the victory was a significant statement by the MLS side on the global stage.

Samu Aghehowa's early penalty gave Porto the lead and they had the better of the first half but Telasco Segovia blasted Miami level and then Messi's free-kick marked the first time a CONCACAF team has defeated a European side in an official FIFA tournament.

"It's a great joy," Messi said. "A lot of effort went into it, and we worked very well. I'm very happy. We were left with a bitter taste after the first match. We thought we could have won it.

"The other day [there were] nerves from a lot of young guys playing in such a significant competition. We've changed. We're going to compete, try to play our game. Today we were the inferior team, but we have our weapons. Next up is Palmeiras, which is a big club in the world. It's going to be another very difficult game."

Inter Miami have four points from two games, meaning they are level atop Group 'A' with Palmeiras after the Brazilians beat Al Ahly 2-0 at MetLife Stadium outside New York.

A draw between Inter Miami and Palmeiras will send both teams into the last 16.



Botafogo's Igor Jesus (top) in action with Nuno Mendes of Paris St Germain during their match at the Rose Bowl Stadium.

China makes history by firing precision laser at the moon in daylight

China has made a groundbreaking achievement in space exploration by successfully firing a precision laser at a satellite orbiting the Moon during the day, overcoming significant solar interference and marking a major leap in deep space navigation technology.

A Giant Leap for Lunar Exploration

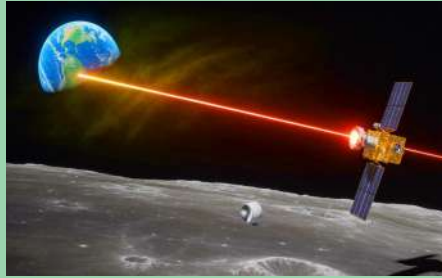
In a remarkable step forward for space exploration, China has demonstrated its advanced technological prowess by executing a precision laser targeting operation on a satellite orbiting the Moon—during daylight. This unprecedented feat, carried out by the Deep Space Exploration Laboratory (DSEL) with the Tiandu-1 satellite, opens new doors for the future of lunar navigation and space communications. It represents not only a technological triumph but also a bold move that could redefine how humanity explores the Moon and beyond.

Firing a laser at a moving object in space, especially in the presence of solar interference, is a significant challenge that had previously left many scientists perplexed. The successful laser bounce on the Tiandu-1 satellite, launched in March 2024 as part of China's growing lunar relay system, signifies a leap in precision and capability for future lunar missions. This event is seen as a starting point for more ambitious endeavors, as China continues to push the envelope in space technology.

A Technological Marvel: Precision Like Never Before

The level of precision involved in this laser targeting is nothing short of extraordinary. Experts have likened it to “hitting a hair at 10 kilometers,” highlighting the immense accuracy required to strike a fast-moving target in the harsh environment of cis-lunar space. The ability to achieve this level of accuracy will dramatically improve the collection of orbital data, paving the way for more reliable positioning systems in future lunar missions.

The Tiandu-1 satellite is a crucial part of China's broader Queqiao constellation, which serves as a communication and navigation network between Earth and the



Moon. This network is designed to support upcoming lunar activities, including landers, rovers, and potentially human missions, all of which will benefit from the enhanced capabilities of this new technology.

Breaking New Barriers in Lunar Communications

By performing laser telemetry during the day, China has solved a critical problem in tracking and communication between Earth and the Moon. The ability to fire a laser in broad daylight effectively eliminates the challenge of solar interference, which has long been a barrier to high-precision tracking systems. This technology is essential for guiding spacecraft, especially during critical phases like landing and real-time coordination of lunar rover fleets.

Looking ahead, this advancement will be key for the upcoming Chang'e-8 mission in 2028, which will test critical technologies for the Lunar Research Station. This international collaboration, co-developed with Russia, aims to establish a sustainable human presence on the Moon. The successful laser telemetry is thus a stepping stone toward enabling autonomous operations on the Moon and ensuring more precise and reliable lunar exploration.

The Future of Deep Space Infrastructure

China's ability to perform laser telemetry during the day represents a game-changer for deep space infrastructure. This achievement ensures that continuous communication and navigation between Earth and the Moon can be maintained without interruptions caused by the Sun's interference. The implications for the long-term sustainability of lunar operations are profound, as it enables more efficient and reliable communication for future lunar missions, including those focused on

scientific research and resource extraction.

In addition to this breakthrough, the deployment of satellites like Tiandu-1 and its counterparts, Tiandu-2 and Queqiao-2, lays the foundation for a comprehensive Earth-Moon network. This network will not only enhance scientific research but also facilitate commercial and international partnerships, further expanding China's role as a leader in space exploration.

China's Vision for a Permanent Lunar Presence

China's recent advancements in lunar exploration are part of a broader vision to establish a permanent presence on the Moon. With the development of cutting-edge technologies and infrastructure, China aims to create a sustainable environment for scientific research and exploration, contributing to global cooperation and technological innovation. The success of this daytime laser telemetry experiment is a crucial step in realizing this vision, showcasing China's commitment to pushing the limits of what's possible in space.

As China continues to make strides in lunar exploration, the international community watches closely. These milestones are not only promising for future missions but also inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers. With new frontiers being explored and unprecedented collaborations on the horizon, one can't help but wonder: What new realms will China explore next in its bold space journey?

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Karachi first beach resort opens



Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab.

Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab inaugurated the Cove Beach Resort at Hawk's Bay recently, the first-ever beach resort in the metropolis established under a public-private partnership (PPP) model.

While speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Mayor declared that Karachiites no longer need to travel abroad for premium beach experiences, as the city now boasts its own world-class leisure destination. The resort, completed in just six months, offers state-of-the-art facilities and is now open to the public.

The mayor described the project as a milestone achievement for the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) and a step toward modernising the city's infrastructure.

Wahab announced that another beach resort is in the pipeline, likely to be developed in Ibrahim Hyderi or Malir, ensuring broader access to high-quality recreational spaces for citizens. He stressed that enhancing Karachi's leisure and tourism sector remains a top priority under his administration.

The mayor outlined several key projects aimed at improving Karachi's livability and economic vitality, which include cleaning of 46 major stormwater drains to prevent urban flooding during monsoon; beautification of II Chundrigar Road, the city's financial hub; preservation of historic landmarks such as Denso Hall, Empress Market, and Frere Hall; development of a mangrove conservation park to promote environmental awareness.

The inauguration was attended by Deputy Mayor Salman Abdullah Murad, City Council Parliamentary Leader Karamullah Waqasi, Deputy Parliamentary Leader Dil Muhammad, and various UC chairmen and officials.

Chitral scores thrilling win over GB as Shandur Polo Festival ends



A view of the final match of Shandur Polo Festival on Sunday 22 June.

After a thrilling contest in the final of the Shandur Polo Festival, Chitral defeated Gilgit-Baltistan by 9 goals to 8. Played at the world's highest polo ground, Shandur, Chitral's Arbab Quli, during the initial moments of the match, on Sunday 22 June, scored the first goal to give his team the lead, which was followed by two more goals by Nasrullah and Azhar Ali Khan in quick succession to consolidate their team's position.

It was a close contest throughout, but in the stipulated time, the match came to a sensational end with both teams levelled at 7-7. However, in the extra seven minutes, Chitral's Izhar Ali Khan scored two goals in a row to clinch victory for his team as Gilgit-Baltistan could manage only one goal.

Chitral's Izhar Ali Khan, who scored four goals, was declared the Man of the Match, while Arbab Quli and Nasrullah scored three and two goals respectively for the winning team.

The Chitral team consisted of Arbab Quli Khan, Izhar Ali Khan, Nasrullah, Shahzad Ahmed Shah Ji, Amir Hamza and captain Israr Wali, while the Gilgit team comprised captain Sher Azam, Sardar, Zulfiqar, Aslam, Nasir and Saddam Raji.

Interestingly, both the teams were down to three players in the last ten

minutes of the match as two horses of Gilgit-Baltistan were injured one after the other. It is worth mentioning that Chitral has been the winner of this competition continuously since 2011.

In the concluding ceremony, Corps Commander 11 Corps Peshawar Lt. Gen. Umar Ahmed Bukhari, chief guest, gave away trophy to the winning team and distributed prizes among the players. The festival was attended by a large number of spectators from Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan as well as foreign and domestic tourists.

Speaking on the occasion, the corps commander said that organising this festival at the world's highest polo ground, Shandur, is a matter of honour for the governments, people and institutions of Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan, which began over a century ago, in 1914. This event means strengthening the bond of love between the people of the two regions, he added.

He also appreciated the enthusiasm of the foreign and domestic tourists who participated in the festival, which was organised by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority in collaboration with the district administrations of Upper and Lower Chitral and law enforcement agencies.

Kaghan valley attracts the record visitors

The police department deployed over 1,500 personnel in the Kaghan valley as a large number of tourists visited the scenic destination during Eid holidays.

"We have provided foolproof security and healthcare services on the special directives of Inspector General of Police Zulfiqar Hameed, in view of the unprecedented influx of visitors to Kaghan valley," District Police Officer Shafiullah Khan Gandapur told reporters at the Damgalla police checkpost here on Monday 9 June.

He said the security plan for Kaghan valley was executed with the heaviest personnel deployment in the region's history, anticipating the massive tourist turnout.

The DPO said that both IGP Zulfiqar Hameed and Deputy Inspector General of Police Hazara Range Nasir Mahmood Satti remained in constant contact with him throughout Eid festival and ordered the enforcement of comprehensive safety measures for the security of visitors.

Saiful Muluk, Loloputsar lakes, Babusar Top remain top tourist destinations

"To assist visitors, facilitation centres were established in Naran and Damgalla, a key point between Balakot and Mansehra," he said.

Mr Gandapur said those centres not only guided travellers about weather and traffic updates but also offered light refreshments, especially for children and women.

He said that trained male and female personnel were deployed along the Mansehra-Naran-Jalkhad Road to provide timely information and assistance to tourists.

The DPO said that emergency medical camps were also set up along the MNJ Road, where doctors, paramedics, and support staff provided healthcare services to travellers.

"In addition to emergency care, we provided refreshments and mobile phone charging services through roaming vans specially arranged to serve visitors during Eid," he said.

Mr Gandapur said that wardens were also deployed at key locations on the Karakoram Highway and MNJ Road to ensure smooth vehicular flow toward the valley.

He said that no untoward incident was reported during the three Eid days.

Meanwhile, as the rest of the country reel under intense heat wave, the visitors feel relieved to experience snow-capped mountains, serene lakes and lush green meadows in Kaghan Valley.



A family enjoying a visit to a stream in Kaghan Valley.

"We, a group of around 3,000 students from Lahore, have been mesmerised by this valley's breathtaking beauty and the refreshing cold weather, especially while the rest of the country has recorded temperatures between 40 and 45 degrees Celsius," girl student Shaista said in Kaghan.

Unusually, Kaghan Valley received a light snowfall in early June, which added to its charm and drew even more visitors from Punjab, Sindh and various parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Popular destinations like Saiful Muluk Lake, Loloputsar Lake and Babusar Top are witnessing a massive influx of tourists.

Picnic spots have also been developed along the Mansehra-Naran-Jalkhad Road, where tourists could be seen relaxing besides gushing glacier-fed water streams.

"This is an incredible experience, sitting in chilled water flowing directly from melting glaciers is unlike anything we've done before," a tourist told media.

The tourism season in the valley is expected to peak in late June, as people from all over Pakistan flee the ongoing heatwave and arrive in large numbers to enjoy the cool climate and scenic views.

Many tourists are also visiting the less-explored Lulusar Lake near Basel and going to Babusar Top and even Gilgit-Baltistan.

The National Highway Authority, which usually opens Babusar Top to traffic in early June, cleared it ahead of schedule this year, boosting tourist movement.

Adventurous activities such as rafting in and ziplining over the Kunhar River are

also major attractions.

Eateries in the area have seen a surge in customers, with tourists enjoying both local and national food amid the chilly mountain air.

"We visited Saiful Muluk Lake and were lucky to experience snowfall at Babusar Top; it was freezing," said a student.

"Our group travelled from Lahore in over 65 coaches, and this might be one of the largest student groups to visit the area ever," Mohammad Jibran said.

He added that his university also organised a night-time music festival featuring traditional songs around a bonfire under the open sky, making it a memorable celebration of graduation and friendship.

A girl student said currently, Lahore was burning under a severe heat wave.

"Coming to Kaghan Valley offers not only an escape from the unbearable heat but also a chance to connect with nature and unwind in a tranquil, picturesque setting," she said.

The police department has re-established the summer checkposts around a dozen places for the security of visitors.

"We have deployed police personnel for the safety of visitors here, and traffic wardens wouldn't fine tourists as we want to exhibit unmatched hospitality during their stay here," district police officer Shafiullah Khan Gandapur said.

He said people coming in from across the country should be cautious while driving in hilly parts of the district, especially in Kaghan valley and mountain ranges along the Karakoram Highway and Mansehra-Naran-Jalkhad Road.



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KPCTA-sponsored bikers rally leaves for scenic Thandiani

A bike rally jointly organised by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) and the Peshawar Bikers Club on Friday 13 June departed from Peshawar for the tourist destination Thandiani in Abbottabad district.

Around 30 motorcyclists are participating in the rally, which will travel from Peshawar via Nowshera, Mardan, Swabi, Haripur, Havelian and Abbottabad before reaching Thandiani. Bikers from Peshawar, Swabi, and other regions are taking part in the event.

Speaking before the departure of the rally, KPCTA Events Manager Muhammad Ali Syed said that the authority was arranging a variety of activities to promote tourism in the province.

He said that these included adventure, cultural, environmental, and other tourism-related events aimed at not only boosting tourism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's scenic places but also strengthening the local economy.

The official said that bike tourism was an affordable form of tourism that allowed youth to participate easily, enabling them to explore more destinations at a lesser cost besides promoting local culture, tourism, and traditions as young bikers engaged with local communities. "The KPCTA promotes tourism through various initiatives and projects," he added.

Peshawar Bikers Club president Sajid Ali Khan said that the club's main goal was to promote tourism in the province. He said that this time, they would also take part in tree-plantation and cleanliness campaigns in a bid to send a positive message to tourists visiting these natural attractions.

The activities, he added, were aimed at encouraging tourists to help preserve the beauty of these scenic destinations in collaboration with the government and local communities. He also said that promoting adventure tourism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including camping at various tourist spots was the aim of his club.

Thandiani is a hill station in the scenic Galiyat area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa located in the northeast of Abbottabad district in the foothills of the Himalayas and the international and domestic tourists visit it round-the-year.



Pakistan, Uzbekistan to launch railway transit corridor

Pakistan and Uzbekistan will soon begin work on the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan Railway Transit Corridor project.

This was decided during a meeting between Federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi and Uzbekistan's Ambassador, Ali Shir Takhtaev, on Tuesday 3 June..

The two sides discussed the railway transit corridor project aimed at enhancing cooperation in the railway sector and developing a joint strategy for its completion.

They described the project as a milestone for regional economic growth and stronger trade ties.

A consensus was reached to finalise collaboration on this approximately 850-kilometre railway project, which includes the construction of a new 647-kilometer railway line through Afghanistan.

The corridor will be the first direct railway link between Central and South Asia, opening new avenues for trade and economic cooperation in the region.

Federal Minister Hanif Abbasi stated, "Upon completion of this project, Pakistan will gain the shortest and most efficient route to Central Asia, which will not only increase trade volumes but also place the regional economy on a solid footing."

He added that the railway corridor would significantly reduce transit time and transportation costs, benefiting all stakeholders.

The corridor is expected to handle an annual freight capacity of 15 million tons, boosting regional export and import volumes.

The minister described the project as a historic milestone that would provide Central Asia with direct access to Pakistan's ports, facilitating global trade connectivity.

He further highlighted the project's strategic significance as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, stating that it would not only strengthen economic relations but also contribute to regional peace and stability.

Ambassador Takhtaev emphasised the investment potential in Pakistan's railway sector and the opportunity to enhance bilateral trade.

He noted that collaborative efforts could foster economic prosperity and generate employment opportunities in both countries.

Both leaders underscored the project's positive impact on promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan, calling it a symbol of development and harmony in the region.

They reaffirmed their commitment to

expanding cooperation in the railway sector and continuing joint development initiatives.

Minister Hanif Abbasi pledged to benefit from Uzbekistan's expertise to modernise Pakistan's railway system and improve operational efficiency through meaningful reforms. Both parties reiterated their dedication to regional cooperation, the activation of economic corridors, and mutual development through sustained collaboration.

Hinglaj Mata Temple declared 'world tourism site'



A devotee strikes a bell while entering the Shri Hinglaj Mata Temple

The Hinglaj Devi Temple, some 200km west of the city of Karachi in the desert of Balochistan, is known for Hindu goddess Hinglaj but it's a common place for the Hindus and the Muslims who have been visiting the place for centuries.

Jürgen Schaflechner, an assistant professor at the Department of Modern South Asian Languages and Literature, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, has written an extensive book on the temple titled, 'Hinglaj Devi Identity, Change, and Solidification at a Hindu Temple in Pakistan'.

In a session at the Lahore Literary Festival (LLF), Schaflechner, in conversation with Sikander Bizanjo, revealed various aspects of the temple, including the architectural, cultural and religious value of the place.

He said it was an important place for many communities, including the Hindus and Muslims. Earlier, it was very difficult to reach the site but it had become easily accessible after construction of the

Makran Coastal Highway. For many pilgrims, according to the writer, the preference was a pilgrimage on foot as many of them believe that the more pain they would go through to reach the temple, the more goodness they would get from the goddess.

Giving an example in this regard, Mr Schaflechner said the people of the area went to other shrines, including Hinglaj Temple, barefoot covering long distances on foot. An annual festival at Hinglaj was also held for the last three decades, in part because of the construction of the Makran Coastal Highway, which connected the distant rural shrine with urban Pakistan.

In his book, the writer encompassed literary sources of Hindi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, and Urdu alongside extensive ethnographic research at the shrine, examining the political and cultural influences at the temple and tracking the remote desert shrine's rapid ascent to its current status as the most influential Hindu pilgrimage site in Pakistan.

Students imparted training on tourism, hospitality in KP

The stakeholders and male and female students were imparted training to better serve the tourists and guests during their visit to the scenic places in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Organised by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) in collaboration with University of Hazara, Mansehra, the stakeholders in the tourism industry, students, hotel and restaurant professionals, and youths were trained during the two-day training workshop on hospitality and tourism.

The closing ceremony was attended by KPCTA Admin & Finance Director Umar Arshad Khan, University of Hazara Dean Dr Shakirullah Khan, Dr Anas

Mehmood Arif, Dr Alam, Hurmat Yab, Taimur Malik and other distinguished guests.

During the workshop, the participants received training on management information systems, digital marketing and artificial intelligence. The first day focused on communication skills and how to adapt to the global landscape while the second day emphasised the use of digital tools and leveraging them for advancement in the tourism sector.

“In today's world, digital marketing and artificial intelligence are pivotal. Therefore, tourism-related professionals, including hotel and restaurant staff, travel agencies, students, Vloggers, YouTubers and others can benefit from this training to enhance their services and provide timely

relevant information to tourists,” the trainees told.

Later, Umar Arshad and Dr Shakirullah Khan distributed certificates among all participants.

The participants expressed their gratitude to the KPCTA for organising the training session at Hazara University.

The guests said that Hazara Division is rich in tourist destinations offering immense opportunities for youth to develop as tour guides, tour operators, and professionals in the tourism sector.

Umar Arshad also said that provincial government was working to promote tourism by organising major events like the Tirich Mir Summit and the Shandur Polo Festival that attracting millions of domestic and international tourists who plan their trips months in advance.



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AJK plans to restore Mughal-era Sarai Saadabad, relocate residents



An elderly man and woman walk through a street inside the Mughal-era roadside inn, Sarai Saadabad, in AJK's Samahni Valley recently.

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government is considering relocating the occupants of a heritage site near the Line of Control (LoC) under a donor-funded programme to ensure both their safety and the restoration of the historic structure for tourism purposes.

This was disclosed by Chaudhry Mukhtar Hussain, Divisional Commissioner of Mirpur, following his visit to Sarai Saadabad located just five kilometres short of the heavily militarised LoC in Samahni valley of Bhimber district. The visit was made on the instructions of AJK Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq.

Accompanied by Bhimber Deputy Commissioner Chaudhry Haq Nawaz and other officials, the commissioner conducted a detailed inspection of the Mughal-era inn. During the visit, he also observed the living conditions of the current residents and interacted with their representatives.

He was informed that around 33 families had been residing within the 12-kanal compound, which once served as a transit camp for Mughal emperors during their annual journeys between Punjab and Kashmir.

Across the LoC, along this route, lies Chingus Sarai in the Rajouri district of Indian-held Jammu. The Samahni valley is home not only to Sarai Saadabad but also to the imposing Baghsar Fort perched at 3,422 feet on the Kalidhar ridge.

Historical accounts state that on the return journey from Kashmir to Lahore in October 1627, Emperor Jahangir died somewhere between Chingus Sarai and Sarai Saadabad. To prevent a war of succession, his wife Empress Noor Jehan concealed his death and ordered the removal of his intestines and entrails to delay decomposition until they reached Lahore.

There are conflicting claims regarding the burial site of the emperor's

entrails. Some historians say they were interred at Chingus Sarai - where a grave exists in the middle of the compound - while others believe the burial occurred at Baghsar Fort, where a larger grave stands near the entrance.

In July 2019, the AJK government

designated around 85 structures and sites, including Sarai Saadabad, as 'protected antiquities' and transferred their control to the Department of Tourism and Archaeology. This list was later expanded.

Commissioner Hussain emphasised that while preserving the heritage site was important, the immediate concern was the safety of the families living in impoverished conditions there due to their extreme vulnerability to cross-LoC shelling.

He said he had earlier brought the matter to the prime minister's attention, who then ordered suitable arrangements for the residents' resettlement.

"The relocation and resettlement of these families will facilitate the restoration of this historical site in accordance with heritage laws while also ensuring the safety of the inhabitants in the event of any future escalations," he said.

He said no forced eviction would occur. Instead, modern homes would be built for the families based on verified records, and the keys would be handed over to the rightful owners in a respectful and dignified manner before relocation begins.

"The restoration of the Sarai to its original form will commence afterwards," he added.

Commending the resilience of the local population, he said their unwavering courage in the face of the enemy was admirable, and assured them that the government would take full responsibility for their care and wellbeing.

Later, speaking to media, Mr Hussain confirmed that land for the relocation had already been identified and the government was preparing for the next stage.

"Given the government's limited financial resources, we would welcome support from national and international donors willing to help build houses for these families," he said.

Trump unveils website for \$5m US residency visa



US President Donald Trump holds up the \$5 million Gold Card during a chat with reporters on board Air Force One.

US President Donald Trump touted a new website for his planned \$5 million US residency permit, saying the waiting list for the golden visa has opened on TrumpCard.gov.

"Thousands have been calling and asking how they can sign up to ride a beautiful road in gaining access to the Greatest Country and Market anywhere in the World," Trump wrote in a social media post on Wednesday 11 June.

Trump unveiled the first such visa aboard Air Force One in April, holding a golden prototype that bore his face and promising the special permit would probably be available "in less than two weeks."

The visas are not available yet, but the website announced on Wednesday 11 June allows interested parties to submit their name, desired visa and email address under a header that says "The Trump Card is Coming."

Trump previously said the new visa, a high-price version of the traditional green card, would bring in job creators and could be used to reduce the US national deficit.

The announcement comes as deportation raids are being ramped up across the country, prompting protests, and as Trump's administration faces ongoing lawsuits and accusations of rights violations over its anti-immigration blitz.

Trump has said the new card would be a route to highly prized US citizenship. He said in February that his administration hoped to sell "maybe a million" of the cards and did not rule out that Russian oligarchs may be eligible.



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AI & human development

ARTIFICIAL Intelligence (AI) is reshaping societies, economies, and governance. But as the UNDP 2025 Human Development Report, *Whose Tech?* Our Choices, reminds us, this transformation is deeply human. UN Secretary General António Guterres warns: “Humanity’s hand must be firmly in control of technology.”

Global inequality is widening, and Human Development Index progress is stalling. For Pakistan, the challenge is real. The latest HDI ranks the country 168th out of 193, placing it in the low development category. This decline stems from economic pressure, limited digital access and structural constraints. Yet this trajectory can be reversed — with vision, investment, especially in human capital — and long-term commitment.

UNDP Pakistan’s 2024 National Human Development Report *Doing Digital for Development*, argues that there can be no meaningful human development without digital progress. Of 121 districts covered in the NHDR, half face low digital development. The richest 20 per cent have a Digital Development Index 15 times higher than the poorest, while women have a Gender DDI only 54.1pc that of men. These divides are not just technical — they shape who participates, who benefits and who is left behind.

While Pakistan expands digital access, the global focus has shifted to AI. France is already at the forefront. Determined to put the AI revolution at the heart of its scientific and industrial ambitions, President Emmanuel Macron announced at the 2024 AI Action Summit in Paris a 109-billion-euro investment in the coming years, mobilised from French and international sources, both public and private.

The summit produced the Paris Actions for AI — a global roadmap for responsible use of AI focused on ecological alignment, job creation and cooperation. France’s 2018 AI strategy led to the establishment of 81 AI labs — the highest concentration in Europe — and continued with the 2025 launch of INESIA, a national institute bringing together public and private actors to assess risks and support ethical AI systems.

Pakistan can draw from this model, promoting inclusive development through AI. The Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication’s

draft national AI Policy outlines ambitious goals: integrating AI into curricula, establishing innovation centres and supporting SMEs, and training one million professionals by 2030. But policy must be matched by investment in institutions, infrastructure and human capacity — with a focus on equal participation of women and marginalised groups. In this regard, strengthening the overall investment environment in Pakistan is essential to successfully adopting cutting-edge AI technologies. This means creating a vibrant ecosystem shaped around universities, start-ups, incubators, and private companies — including foreign investors — to help spread AI more widely across society.

Pakistan’s youthful population and growing tech sector provide a strong foundation, and IT industries are expanding rapidly. In Punjab, an AI-based building detection system supports vaccination in remote areas. At Nust, AI tools diagnose tuberculosis and brain tumours with over 90pc accuracy. Universities like Quaid-i-Azam and Bahria are scaling up AI research, while 16-year-old Mahrose Zufran from Karachi developed a Sindhi-language calculator in just three days.

To realise AI’s promise, digital space must be grounded in fairness, transparency and inclusion. Around 42pc of Pakistan’s workforce holds routine-based roles, vulnerable to automation. Many are held by women. Meeting this challenge requires scaling up STEM education without snuffing innovation outside the classroom, diversifying digital skills training, and advancing digital spaces centred around people — not just profit.

Digital public infrastructure is critical. From reliable internet in underserved areas to strong data protection laws, Pakistan must build systems that reach all and uphold digital rights. These efforts must balance speed with care, innovation with equity and governance with trust.

AI’s benefits are not guaranteed. Without oversight, it could deepen exclusion, displace jobs and fuel misinformation. With thoughtful policy, public debate and global cooperation, AI can support sustainable development, create future-ready jobs, and strengthen democratic institutions.

At this juncture, Pakistan must decide whether to be shaped by technology or to shape it on its own terms. With principled leadership, coherent policy, and forward-looking partnerships — including between France and Pakistan —



A man celebrates with his child after offering Eidul Azha prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque

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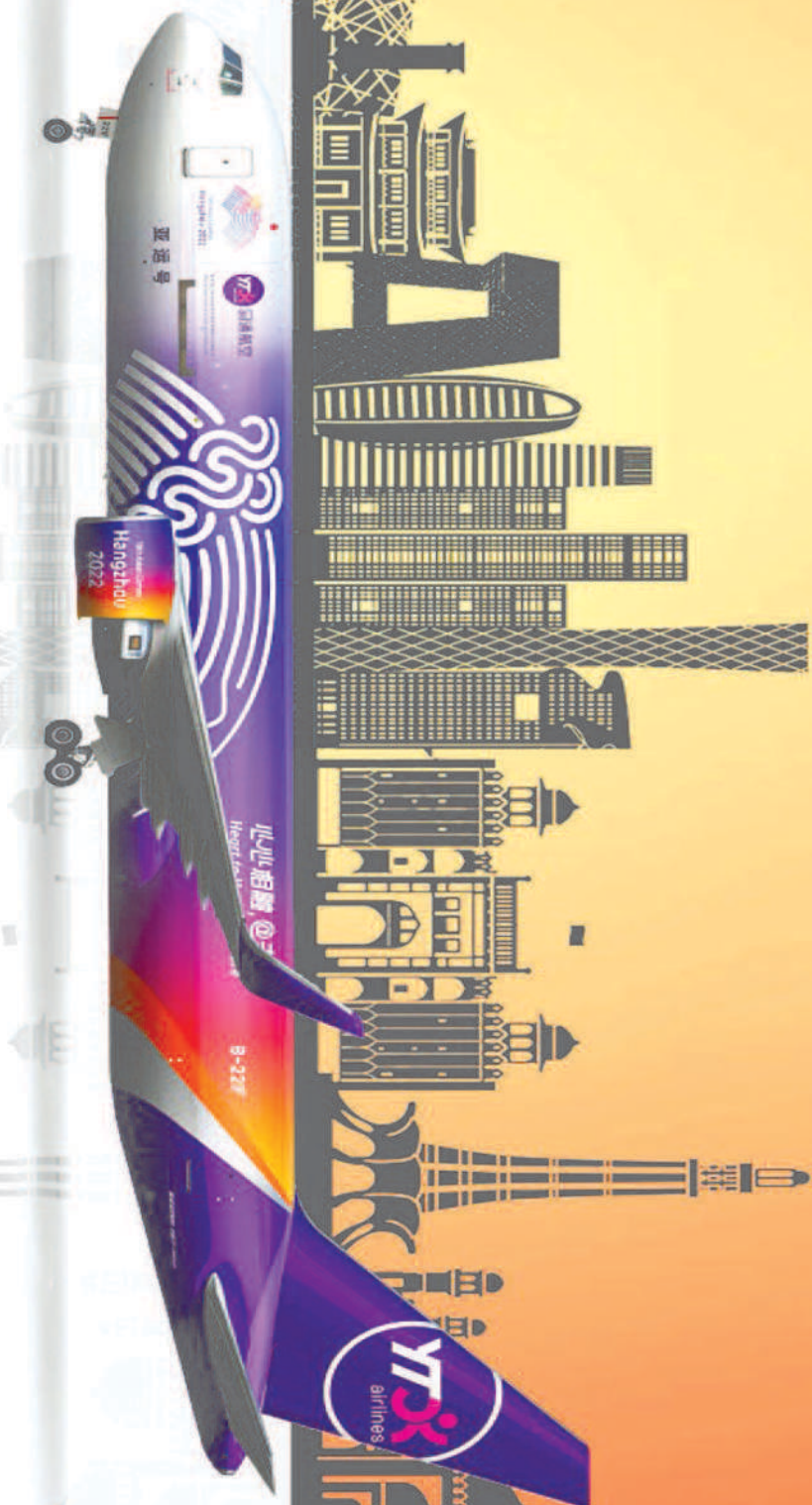
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