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- **Airlines raise ticket prices**
- **Pakistan's airspace 'fully available'**
- **Karachi Airport runway upgraded**
- **Hajj flights to operate from Sialkot**
- **Pakistan to facilitate stranded ships**



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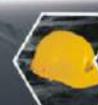
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AirSial Acquires Two Airbus A320s, Fleet Reaches 15 Aircraft

AirSial has signed an agreement with DAE Capital in Dubai to acquire two Airbus A320 aircraft, which are expected to join its fleet in 2027.

The deal was signed in the presence of Chairman Fazal Jilani, CEO Ameen Ahsan, COO Tariq Amin, Director Engineering Azhar Qayyum, and David Houlihan.

With this addition, AirSial's fleet will expand to 15 aircraft, strengthening its operational capacity, network reach, and passenger experience. The airline said the move aligns with its growth strategy and commitment to delivering quality service.

Airlines raise ticket prices as ME conflict drives up fuel costs

Australia's Qantas Airways, Scandinavia's SAS and Air New Zealand announced airfare hikes on Tuesday March 10, blaming an abrupt spike in the cost of fuel caused by the Middle East conflict.

Jet fuel prices, which were around \$85 to \$90 per barrel before US-Israeli strikes on Iran, have soared to between \$150 and \$200 per barrel in recent days, New Zealand's flag carrier said as it suspended its financial outlook for 2026 due to uncertainty over the conflict.

The war, which disrupted shipping via the world's most vital oil export route, has sent oil prices surging, upending global travel, pushing airline tickets on some routes sky-high, and sparking fears of a deep travel slump that could lead to widespread grounding of planes.

"Increases of this magnitude make it necessary to react in order to maintain stable and reliable operations," an SAS spokesperson said in a statement to media, adding it had implemented a "temporary price adjustment".

The largest Scandinavian airline said last year it had temporarily adjusted its fuel hedging policy due to uncertain market conditions and that it had no fuel consumption hedged for the following 12 months.

Several Asian and European airlines, including Lufthansa and Ryanair, have oil hedging in place, securing a part of their fuel supplies at fixed prices. Finnair, which had hedged over 80 per cent of its first-quarter fuel purchases, warned, however, that even the availability of fuel could be at risk if the conflict dragged on.

"A prolonged crisis could affect not only the price of fuel but also its availability, at least temporarily," a Finnair spokesperson said, adding that it had not seen this happening yet. Kuwait, a major jet fuel exporter to north-west Europe, has faced output cuts.

Airspace chaos in Middle East

Highlighting the airspace chaos in the Middle East, planes arriving in Dubai were briefly placed in a holding pattern on Tuesday March 10 due to a potential missile attack, flight tracking service Flightradar24 said on X. The planes eventually landed.

Qantas said in addition to increasing international fares, it was exploring redeploying capacity to Europe as airlines and passengers seek to evade disruptions in the Middle East, where drone and missile fire have curtailed flights. Airfares have soared on Asia-Europe routes due to airspace closures and capacity constraints, and Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways said it was adding extra flights to London and Zurich in March.

Air New Zealand said it had raised one-way economy fares by NZ\$10 (\$6) on domestic routes, NZ\$20 on short-haul international services and NZ\$90 on long-haul, with more adjustments to prices and schedules possible if jet fuel costs remain elevated.

Hong Kong Airlines said on its website it would raise its fuel surcharges by up to 35.2pc from Thursday March 10, with the sharpest increase on flights between Hong Kong and the Maldives, Bangladesh and Nepal. Still, some European airlines said they saw no near-term need to act yet. A spokesperson for

British Airways-owner IAG said it was well-hedged for the immediate future and had no plans to change ticket prices.

Some airline stocks rose and oil prices fell to around \$90 a barrel on Tuesday March 10 from a high of \$119 on Monday after US President Donald Trump said on Monday the war could be over soon. When markets opened in Europe, airline shares were up between 4pc and 7pc.

In addition to high fuel costs, tightening airspace also threatens to derail the global travel industry, as pilots reroute to avoid the Middle East conflict and capacity on popular routes fills up.

Emirates, Qatar Airways and Etihad typically jointly account for about one-third of the passenger traffic between Europe and Asia and fly more than half of all passengers from Europe to Australia, New Zealand and nearby Pacific Islands, according to Cirium.

European airlines have already struggled with the shortage of available airspace created by the war in Ukraine, with many avoiding Russian airspace and flying longer international routes.





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Arif Habib-led group to gain full control of PIA



The consortium led by the Arif Habib Group has announced plans to acquire the remaining 25 per cent government stake in Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), thereby securing full control of the national flag carrier.

In December 2025, the group acquired a 75pc stake for Rs135 billion, with the goal of transforming the loss-making airline through operational restructuring, fleet expansion, and improved customer service. To ensure the success of its revival plan, the consortium now seeks to take full control of decision-making.

The acquisition will allow the consortium to implement management changes by the end of April. Shahid Ali Habib, CEO of ArifHabib Ltd, told media that this will enable them to operate as a private entity, free from government-appointed board members.

“The change of sponsors is scheduled for late April or early May,” he added.

The government has given the consortium a 90-day window to purchase the remaining shares, valued at approximately Rs45bn, with the deadline set for the end of April. The agreement, signed in January, allows a 12-month period to transfer funds, making the acquisition a viable option.

The winning consortium includes Fatima Fertiliser (34.1pc), Fauji Fertiliser (33.9pc), Lake City (16pc), and the City School with AKD (Aqeel Karim Dhedhi) Group (16pc). The new management, supported by Rs125bn, will have the financial flexibility to implement reforms, with the new board tasked with raising capital for PIA's rebranding.

PIA was established in 1955 and became a public limited company in 2016 through the Pakistan International Airlines (Conversion) Act.

Following approval from the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) in May 2024, PIA was delisted

from the stock exchange and became a wholly owned subsidiary of PIA Holding Company Ltd (PIAHCL), formed in March 2024 to oversee the airline's privatisation.

Pakistan's airspace 'fully available' for civil aviation traffic: PAA

The Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) said on Tuesday 3 March that the country's airspace remains fully open, safe, and completely available for all civil aviation traffic.

The clarification came after the authority issued a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) regarding specific air routes in the Karachi and Lahore regions, saying they would remain unavailable from March 3 to 31 between 9am and 3pm daily.

The NOTAM stated that selected Air Traffic Service (ATS) route segments in the Karachi (OPKR) and Lahore (OPLR)

Flight Information Regions (FIRs) would remain unavailable during the above-mentioned period due to operational reasons.

In a subsequent statement, the PAA said that the NOTAM was a routine operational advisory.

“It announces the temporary unavailability of specific ATS route segments within the Karachi and Lahore FIRs during daily windows (0900-1500 PKT) from March 3 to 31. These segments are closed from ground level to unlimited altitude due to standard operational reasons,” the statement said.

“Pakistan's airspace as a whole remains fully open, safe, and completely available for all civil aviation traffic, including commercial flights. Air traffic services continue without hindrance, and alternative routing options are available and routinely used for all affected flows,” the authority added.

“No restrictions have been imposed on commercial operations, arrivals, departures, or overflights across Pakistan. Our air traffic controllers and airport teams are fully operational and managing traffic normally,” it further stated.

Meanwhile, no commercial flight operated between the Middle East and Islamabad on Monday, except for an Etihad Airways flight that landed there.

Airblue the 1st to land on upgraded runway



On February 19, airblue Airbus A321 flight PA171 from Jeddah became the first commercial flight to land on reconstructed & upgraded Runway 07L/25R of Karachi Airport.

Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) fire tenders greeted the aircraft with a traditional water cannon salute. The aircraft landed on Runway 07L at 12:21 PM.

Secretary Defence Inaugurates A380-Ready Runway 07L/25R at Jinnah International Airport

Secretary Defence Lt. Gen. (R) Muhammad Ali HI (M) formally inaugurated the newly reconstructed Runway 07L/25R, marking a significant milestone in Pakistan's aviation infrastructure development. Additional Secretary Defence Maj. Gen. Qaiser Suleiman also attended the ceremony. Director General Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) Air Vice Marshal Zeeshan Saeed, Director General Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority Nadir Shafi Dar, Deputy Director General (Works & Development) Sumair Saeed, the Project Director Hafiz Zahid Ishaq, Director Planning & Development Ghulam Abbas Sheikh, and senior officials were present.

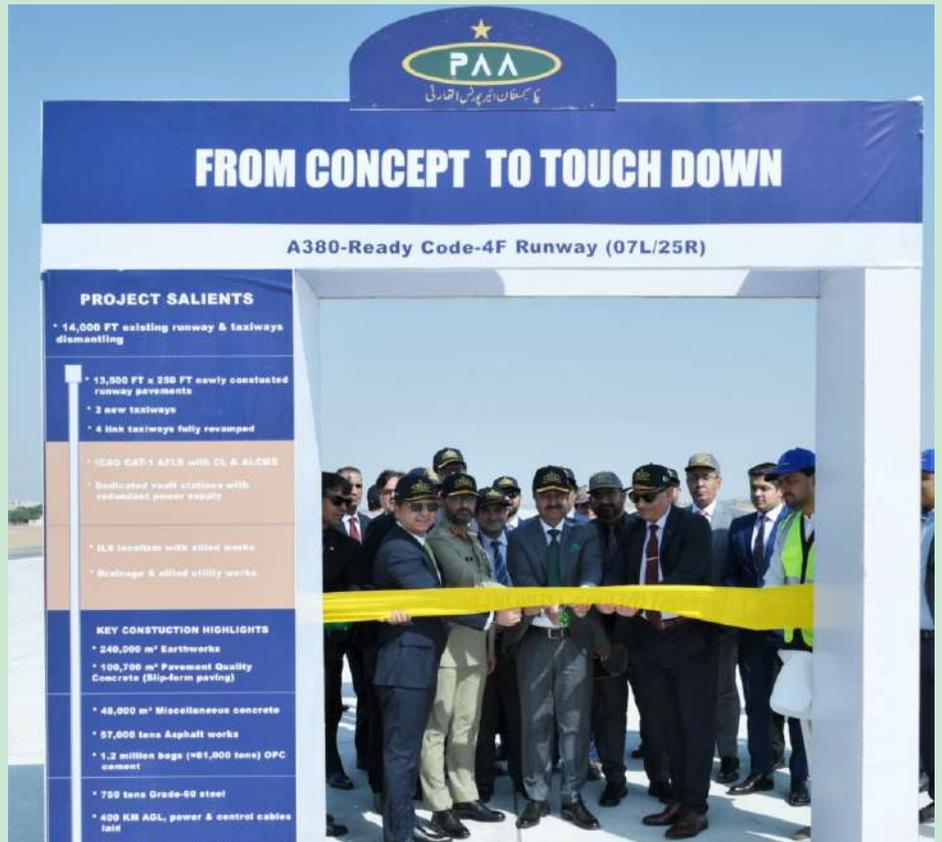
The upgraded Code-4F runway is fully A380-ready and has been completed in strict compliance with ICAO Annex 14 Standards and Recommended Practices. The project was delivered within 18 months with zero delays, zero cost overruns, zero claims, and zero accidents - setting a benchmark in public-sector project execution.

Speaking on the occasion, the Secretary Defence commended PAA's leadership, engineers, consultants, contractors, and workforce for delivering world-class infrastructure aligned with international aviation standards and national priorities.

Souvenirs were presented to the Secretary Defence and Additional Secretary Defence. The Secretary Defence presented special honorary shields to DG PAA, Deputy DG (Works & Development), the Project Director, and Director Planning & Development in recognition of their exemplary hard work and dedication.

The ceremony also featured a cake-cutting ceremony to commemorate the successful completion of the landmark project.

The reconstruction of Runway 07L/25R strengthens operational resilience, enhances heavy aircraft handling capability, and reinforces Karachi's position as a strategic aviation gateway.



22-Member delegation of KIM Muzaffarabad visits SIAL

Sialkot. A 22-member delegation from the Kashmir Institute of Management (KIM), Muzaffarabad, visited Sialkot International Airport (SIAL) as part of its inland study tour, aimed at broadening the professional outlook of civil servants through exposure to nationally significant institutions.

The objective of the visit was to enrich participants with practical knowledge, institutional understanding, and governance-oriented insights to strengthen public service delivery for the citizens of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. In this regard, Sialkot International Airport was deliberately selected by KIM as an institution of national importance, owing to its unique public-private model, operational excellence, and strategic role in Pakistan's aviation and trade landscape. Upon arrival, the delegation was warmly received by senior officials of Sialkot International Airport. The participants were later given a detailed and interactive briefing by Chief Executive Officer SIAL, AVM Tanweer Ashraf Bhatti (R), who comprehensively shared the journey of Sialkot International Airport from its visionary inception to its current operational progress along with future growth prospects and development pathways.

The briefing highlighted SIAL's pioneering role as Pakistan's first privately owned public international airport, its contribution to regional economic uplift, and its evolving operational capabilities in passenger facilitation and cargo handling. The session also allowed for meaningful dialogue, enabling the delegation to gain firsthand insights into institutional leadership, stakeholder coordination, and sustainable infrastructure development. The delegates were also given an introductory tour of the airport terminal and other areas. The visit concluded with mutual appreciation, reflecting SIAL's continued commitment to knowledge-sharing and national capacity building, while reinforcing its standing as a learning destination for public sector institutions across the country. The Chief instructor leading the delegation acknowledged the role of Sialkot's dynamic business community in making this dream of an airport come true. He added that this is not just an airport infact it is a pure reflection of dedication and commitment.



AVM (R) Tanweer Ashraf Bhatti, CEO of SIAL, presenting a memento to the honourable guest on the occasion,



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Special flights to evacuate travellers stranded in Middle East



A passenger gestures upon arrival at the airport in Frankfurt, Germany, from Dubai.

Governments and airlines are sending special flights to rescue tens of thousands of travellers stranded in the Middle East war even as some carriers on Tuesday 3 March tentatively resumed flights.

The situation remains dangerous in the region, with Qatar saying it had blocked Iranian attacks on its airport, one of the major hubs in the region.

The US and Israeli attacks on Iran have prompted several countries to shut their airspace.

At least 12,903 flights were cancelled between Saturday and Monday, representing 40 percent of planned flights, according to aviation data analysis firm Cirium. Cirium estimates that flights in the region account for around 900,000 seats each day, so the number of affected travellers could already be more than one million.

Slow resumption

On Sunday 1st March, nearly all flights were cancelled out of the UAE.

The cancellation rate fell to 93.5 percent on Monday 2 March after Dubai — and Abu Dhabi's airport — resumed limited operations.

Several Emirates flights took off Tuesday morning, according to the Flightradar24 flight tracking website. The aircraft immediately flew south out of the Gulf region.

Only some flights by Emirates, low-cost flydubai and Russia's Aeroflot were operating.

Numerous Royal Jordanian flights took off and landed at Amman airport, but flew via the south of the country to avoid Israeli airspace.

Flights continue to come in and out of Saudi Arabia and Oman, and their

airspace is being used by long-haul flights between Europe and Asia.

No civilian flights passed through airspace above Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Libya or Qatar, however.

Evacuation flights planned

Several countries have organised evacuation flights to repatriate their nationals. Two evacuation flights with 200 passengers each landed in the Czech capital Prague on Tuesday 3 March morning.

“We are preparing to charter flights so that the most vulnerable people... can benefit,” said French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot.

He said around 400,000 French nationals were in the dozen countries affected by the conflict. Germany had announced on Monday it would send aircraft to Saudi Arabia and Oman as soon as possible to evacuate the most vulnerable travellers.

Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl told *Welt TV* that a government-chartered flight will leave Oman on Wednesday 4 March, with Lufthansa confirmed it will fly. There are around 30,000 Germans stranded in the region, according to the German Tourism Association.

Travel firm TUI said it would begin flying home 5,000 clients stranded on two of its cruise ships in the Gulf via Dubai.

Three Indian airlines — IndiGo, Air India Express and Akasa Air — announced a limited number of evacuation flights to the Middle East.

Three flights evacuating Italians were expected to land in Rome and Milan later Tuesday 3 March, according to the airports. British foreign minister Yvette Cooper said a UK government charter flight would bring home British nationals from Oman in the coming days.

British Airways said it had scheduled a flight from Oman on Thursday 5 March.

Spain's Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares said his country was also organising evacuation flights, and an Etihad plane carrying Spanish nationals was set to land in Madrid on Tuesday evening 3 March.

Pakistanis travelling to UK can now get e-visas

Pakistanis, including tourists, travelling to the United Kingdom (UK) will now be able to do so with an e-visa, receiving confirmation by email rather than stickers in passports, according to a statement issued by the British High Commission on Wednesday 25 Feb..

In July 2025, the UK government introduced an e-visa system for Pakistanis; however, it was limited to study or work visas. Applicants applying for general visitor visas were still required to obtain a physical visa.

In the statement released on Wednesday 25 Feb, the high commission said visitors would continue to submit their applications online and attend a visa application centre to provide biometrics.

It said that successful applicants would have a digital record of their immigration status provided through an e-visa, accessible through an online UK Visas and Immigration account.

“It means applicants no longer need to attend a visa application centre a second time to collect their passport, instead holding on to it after their biometrics session,” the commission said.

It said that e-visas provided a more secure way to manage immigration status and reduce the risk of lost or damaged documents.

“Applicants can generate a share code to prove their visa status at borders and elsewhere. There is no change to visa processing times, eligibility criteria or conditions,” it said.

The statement also quoted British High Commissioner Jane Marriott as saying that this was a “hugely exciting step” for Pakistanis travelling to the UK.

“As well as being able to save time by holding on to your passport, the new share code system makes it easier than ever to demonstrate your visa status,” she said.

Separately, in a video message posted on her X account on Wednesday 25 Feb, Marriot said that “nearly all visitors going to the UK can now use the new e-visa service when they travel”.

She said that under the new system, travellers will be able to keep their passports with them as they will not be required to hand them in.

She added that the “major difference is that you get to keep your passport with you and you no longer need to visit a visa centre for a second time (to pick up your passport)”.

She further said that “the process and application timelines have not changed”.

In 2024, the UK government had announced that the country's immigration system was transitioning to a fully digital format, replacing physical documents with an online immigration system.

Airport mess

The chaos at the country's major airports seems to be subsiding, with some order gradually restored after the state's ham-handed efforts to crack down on unlawful travel. The past few months had been a nightmare, with passengers travelling abroad from Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad routinely complaining of long queues, repeated questioning by security personnel, and extremely long waits for immigration clearance. It seems that some unscrupulous elements had also jumped at the opportunity to fleece time stressed travellers by furtively offering 'facilitation services' in exchange for extortive 'fees'. Some passengers had even complained on social media that the free-to-use luggage trolleys meant to facilitate travellers had 'disappeared' from their usual drop-off spots, and they were forced to pay to use one. Then there were the reports of passengers being denied boarding on flimsy pretexts, or for no reason at all. It seems that the growing discontent finally forced the authorities to restore some order.

While there is no question that Pakistan needs to crack down on human smuggling and prevent unscrupulous elements from travelling abroad for less-than-legitimate reasons, the way the authorities went about it has left a bad taste. There was never any good reason to subject all foreign travellers to dehumanizing and distressing checks and interrogation at the final stage of departure. If the authorities were serious, they would have launched a comprehensive drive against criminals running human smuggling networks, as well as the shysters and 'immigration advisers' who sell promises of employment abroad in return for exorbitant fees. That they chose to inconvenience countless travellers including the old, the sick and those travelling with little children just so that they could 'look good in the eyes of those passing the orders goes to show what little consideration is accorded to ordinary citizens. One can only be grateful that sense seems to be prevailing at last. Otherwise, this could just as easily have become standard operating procedure.

Semblance of calm touches down at airport after bizarre 'meltdown'



A woman takes farewell selfies with loved ones while other passengers calmly enter the international departure lounge.

Had there not been all those videos on social media of international passengers at the Jinnah International Airport complaining about complete mismanagement and utter chaos in the departure area, one would not have believed the calm and orderly scene that lay before one at international departures there on Wednesday 11 Feb..

It was only days ago that the airport was said to have turned into 'a place of embarrassment for international travellers and daily humiliation for Pakistani citizens thanks to basic operational incompetence' where one officer was expected to manage three parallel lines at immigration.

The passengers were constantly pointing out the problems to the airport staff, but there neither seemed to be the willingness nor the capacity to fix things.

The bags which had already been passed through a scanner once were being scanned again before being sent to baggage, which was a complete waste of time and effort.

But was that an alternate uni-verse where passengers also claimed that airport staff had demanded money from them in

exchange for use of luggage carts? And what of those unending queues facing closed doors outside at international departures? Well, they aren't there anymore.

Seeing three travellers squatting near a pillar on Wednesday, one asked them if they had been waiting there for long. 'Yes, we reached here about half an hour ago,' replied one of them as he eyed the electronic board to see if check-in for their flight had been announced. Another passenger en route to Jeddah said that he arrived four hours before his flight 'because I always do that'.

There was also no apparent shortage of luggage carts or trolleys at the passenger drop-off area, contrary to what had been reported earlier. Airport staff were seen bringing more freed up trolleys from the departure lounge which they had neatly lined up.

A group wearing identical brown cross body bags gathered to say goodbye to family members who had come to see them off. All looked relaxed and happy as they loaded their bags on the trolleys, posed for pictures and enjoyed the sweetmeats being distributed among them by a family member.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) said while occasional peakhour pressures can occur in a high volume gateway like Jinnah International, 'the immigration process managed by the FIA remains the most frequently raised concern among passengers. Reports of any difficulties with trolley availability, on the other hand, have been very limited and appear to reflect an isolated occurrence rather than a recurring issue.'

Centrum Air starts flight to Pakistan



From March 30, Centrum Air starting twice-a-week flights between Tashkent and Lahore with Airbus A320.

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Hajj flights to operate from Sialkot International Airport

This year the Hajj flights will operate from Sialkot International Airport. Pakistan National Flag carrier (PIA) has shared its Hajj Flights schedule to & from Sialkot International Airport followed by AirSial has also indicated its intention to operate Hajj Flights from Sialkot Airport this year.

SIAL management has completed special arrangements for Hajj operations, including dedicated check-in counters for pilgrims, special facilitation at immigration and customs, guidance desks, medical facilities, and special assistance for elderly pilgrims.

During the Hajj operations, SIAL management will remain in close coordination with all relevant and allied departments to ensure that pilgrims do not face any inconvenience. The staff deployed at Sialkot International Airport will remain available round the clock to ensure premium services for the pilgrims.

Chairman SIAL, Mr. Hassan Ali Bhatti, expressed his gratitude to the Government for their unconditional support and appreciated the tireless efforts of the Federal Minister for Defence Mr Khawaja Muhammad Asif. He stated that with the cooperation of the Government, Sialkot International Airport will once again provide the best travel facilities to Hajj pilgrims this year, for which a formal schedule has been issued.

Vice Chairman SIAL, Mr. Waqas

Afzal, stated that the SIAL administration is fully committed to ensuring smooth and well-organized Hajj operations and to facilitating pilgrims at every step of their journey. SIAL management has requested Hajj pilgrims to arrive at the airport well before their scheduled flight time, carry all necessary travel and identification documents, and extend full cooperation to the airport staff so that the Hajj journey may be made pleasant and dignified. Sialkot International Airport extends its best wishes and prayers to all Hajj pilgrims for a safe and blessed journey.

High Commission strengthens partnerships with travel agents to promote visit Malaysia 2026

On Thursday, 12 February 2026, the High Commissioner of Malaysia met with a group of leading travel agents at the High Commission to strengthen strategic partnerships in support of Visit Malaysia 2026.

The meeting focused on enhancing collaboration with travel industry partners to actively promote Malaysia as a preferred destination for tourism, business, and education. The High Commissioner underscored the vital role of travel agents in expanding outreach, designing attractive travel packages, and

increasing tourist arrivals from Pakistan in conjunction with Visit Malaysia 2026.

Discussions covered joint promotional initiatives, coordinated marketing campaigns, and greater engagement to showcase Malaysia's diverse attractions, modern cities, island destinations, shopping experiences, and rich cultural heritage.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to work closely together in advancing Visit Malaysia 2026 efforts and further strengthening tourism flows and people-to-people ties between Malaysia and Pakistan.



Pakistan moves to digital cargo tracking

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has launched the design phase of a Digital National Cargo Tracking System (CTS) and an e-Bilty mechanism to curb smuggling, fake and flying invoices, and facilitate legitimate trade.

As part of the initiative, the FBR on Thursday 5 March signed a contract with a South Korean-based company to conduct the strategic feasibility assessment and develop the solution design for the CTS and e-Bilty mechanism. The company will complete the design work within six months.

The project, financed by the World Bank under the Pakistan Raises Revenue Programme (PRRP), is being led by the National Targeting Centre (NTC). It seeks to replace the traditional, manual, paper-based goods transport document, locally known as the 'Bilty', with a centralised, technology-driven electronic transport waybill known as the e-Bilty.

FBR Chairman Rashid Mahmood Langrial said the project will be implemented within 1.5 years after the completion of the design work. He said the implementation phase will involve multiple stakeholders.

System to be implemented in 1.5 years; e-Bilty mechanism to curb smuggling, boost revenues

He said the CTS and e-Bilty mechanism will help end sales tax fraud and curb smuggling. He said the system will play an important role in monitoring local production and documenting imported goods.

Under the system, each vehicle will be assigned a unique ID, visible from a distance and easily readable by installed devices. The details of every cargo will be linked to its ID and accessible to customs officers on the road.

Vehicles with a strong compliance record will be allowed to pass through a green channel and will not be subjected to physical checks on the road by customs officers. Such vehicles will also be recommended to other authorities for exemption from routine inspections.

Mr Langrial said vehicles in the yellow category will be subject to on-the-road physical checks. He said that every invoice issued will now have to be supported by evidence of transport movement, which will help eliminate the issuance of fake and flying invoices.

The chairman said the system will be implemented in phases. In the first phase, large companies and major importers will be brought into the system as they represent fewer players but account for large trade volumes. He said the system will initially operate voluntarily, but it will later become mandatory for all vehicles.

Currently, the reliance on manual checks by multiple agencies and paper documentation causes significant bottlenecks, prolongs transit times for legitimate traders, and creates opportunities for tax evasion and smuggling.

The envisioned CTS platform will enable the real-time tracking of commercial cargo from the point of origin to the destination. By generating an e-Bilty with a unique, instantly verifiable QR code, the system will allow Customs enforcement teams to efficiently segregate compliant from non-compliant cargo.

"This initiative is a cornerstone of our broader vision for a digital and transparent economy," FBR chairman said. By integrating the CTS with existing systems like WeBOC, STRIVE (Sales Tax Real-time Invoice Verification), and the Anti-Smuggling Portal, "we are closing the loopholes that allow for fake sales tax invoices and mis-declaration of goods, the chairman said, adding this ensures a level playing field for honest businesses and secures the nation's revenue", he added.

Pakistan's airspace sees 15% surge in overflying aircraft due to Middle East airspace closer

Ongoing tensions in the Middle East have significantly increased international flight traffic over Pakistan, with the number of aircraft crossing the country's airspace rising by about 15%.

Officials say the surge has pushed the



daily number of overflying flights beyond 700, generating higher revenue for Pakistan's aviation authorities.

According to sources, the changing security situation in the Middle East has forced many international airlines to adjust their flight routes.

As a result, Pakistan's airspace has witnessed a noticeable increase in traffic, with more than 700 flights now passing through daily. This represents a 15% rise compared to normal traffic levels.

Aviation revenue increases

The increased air traffic has also boosted earnings for the Pakistan Airport Authority (PAA). Sources say the authority is currently earning around \$800,000 per day from overflying aircraft fees. The recent rise in flights has increased daily income by approximately \$150,000. The additional revenue comes from navigation and overflight charges paid by international airlines using Pakistan's airspace.

Comparison with normal flight traffic Under normal circumstances, between 550 and 600 flights typically pass through Pakistan's airspace each day. However, the ongoing Middle East situation has altered global aviation routes, diverting more aircraft over Pakistan and pushing daily traffic well above usual levels.

Airspace closed to Indian airlines

Despite the surge in international flights, Pakistan has not reopened its airspace to Indian airlines. Sources confirmed that Pakistan has kept its airspace closed to Indian carriers since April 23, 2025, a restriction that remains in place.

SEAP congratulates PIA



SEAP extends its sincerest congratulations to Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) on the inauguration of its direct flights to London. PIA takes pride in offering four weekly non-stop flights from Islamabad and Lahore to London, bridging distances for what matters most. The service commences on 29th March 2026.

Gerry's International signs MoU with IAS

Gerry's International Pvt Ltd. is pleased to announce the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Institute of Aviation Studies (IAS), University of Management and Technology, Lahore.

The MoU marks the beginning of a strategic collaboration focused on Co-operative Experiential Learning (COOP) programs, internship opportunities for aviation students, industrial visits, and industry-academia engagement initiatives. This partnership will enable us to support the development of future aviation professionals while strengthening our talent pipeline for North & Central operations.

The ceremony was attended by Ms. Seemab Zaman, GM – North & Central, representing Gerry's International. The MoU was formally signed by COO, Mr. Hanif Zakaria, with Ms. Seemab Zaman co-signing on behalf of the organization, alongside Prof. Dr. Ahmad Aizaz, Dean – Institute of Aviation Studies, UMT and Program Head, Mr. Bilal Ahmad.

We look forward to fostering industry-ready talent, strengthening employer branding, and building long-term collaboration with UMT to contribute to the growth of Pakistan's aviation sector.



Strengthening enduring Pakistan-Turkiye ties



Group Director Arshad Wali Muhammad met with the Consul General of Türkiye, H.E. Ergul Kadak, for an insightful and productive discussion focused on exploring opportunities for collaboration and further strengthening the longstanding, enduring brotherly ties between Pakistan and Türkiye

Pakistan extends airspace ban on Indian airlines

Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) has extended the airspace restrictions on Indian aircraft till March 23.

The airspace will remain closed for all Indian civil and military registered aircraft till March 23, the Pakistan Airport Authority (PAA) said in a new notice to airmen (Notam).

Pakistan's airspace is divided into two flight information regions (FIRs) — Karachi and Lahore, according to a Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) document from 2022. The Notam applies to both the Karachi (OPKR) and Lahore (OPLR) FIRs.

The ban on Indian registered aircraft was imposed due to ongoing tension between the two countries. India and Pakistan have closed their airspace to each

other's airlines since tensions between them escalated in late April last year in the wake of a shooting in India-held Kashmir that killed 26 people. Initially Pakistan had closed its airspace on April 24, 2025 and later the ban was extended multiple times.

New Delhi, without evidence, had alleged that Islamabad backed the attack. Pakistan strongly denied any involvement and offered a neutral probe. Then, in early May, the nuclear-armed nations fought their fiercest military conflict in decades. Pakistan says it downed seven Indian jets during the conflict.

Amid a financial toll from a ban on Indian carriers flying over Pakistan, it was reported in November that Air India was lobbying the Indian government to convince China to let it use a sensitive military airspace zone in Xinjiang to shorten routes.

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Private jets offer pricey escape from Gulf as commercial flights falter



With commercial air travel in the Middle East faltering amid missile threats that have forced major carriers to divert flights, a desperate scramble to flee the war-hit Gulf has fuelled a surge in demand for private jets, sending prices as high as \$200,000 for a one-way trip.

When Samuel Lait launched PetX Jets, a private flight firm focused on pet travel in Dubai, he expected queries from owners flying with their animals. Instead, his inbox is full of requests from young adults, pregnant couples and the elderly wanting to flee the United Arab Emirates.

“The original idea was to transport pets and their owners between the UK and Dubai primarily. And that’s very much changed recently,” Lait said. “We’re trying to sort of move with what’s happening.”

Residents and travellers are exploring alternative ways to leave, including crossing by land into Oman and Saudi Arabia to catch flights.

“Since the escalation of tensions in the region, we have seen a significant increase in bookings ... every 10 minutes we have requests,” said Altay Kula, CEO of France-based private jet broker Jet-VIP. “People are seeking solutions to leave the Middle East, particularly Dubai and Qatar.”

Both Lait and Kula said charter flight prices from the region have leaped since the conflict began.

The typical price for a light jet carrying six people from Dubai to Istanbul has doubled from \$50,000 to \$100,000, Kula said. A heavier aircraft for up to 15 people has jumped from \$110,000 to \$200,000.

Operators also face a scarcity of airport slots in nearby hubs like Muscat and Riyadh due to spiking traffic. Kula said it can take up to 24 hours just to get

authorisation to pick up passengers in Oman, while airspace restrictions make it difficult to get slots in Dubai itself.

Rescue flights hindered

Separately, a Lufthansa jet headed to the Middle East diverted over safety fears and an Air France repatriation flight was forced back by missile fire on Friday, underscoring the extreme danger in the region’s skies even as some Emirati airlines resumed limited flights from the war-hit Gulf.

The outbreak of the US-Israel war against Iran has led to widespread flight cancellations, leaving airlines and governments scrambling to support thousands of stranded passengers as the conflict entered its seventh day. The disruption has hit global travel, sending airline shares from New Zealand to Japan sliding and driving up fuel prices over supply fears.

Passengers have paid huge sums for last-minute dashes to airports and overland trips to less impacted hubs to escape the Middle East. With most regional airspace still closed over missile

and drone concerns, some described the situation as “absolute chaos”.

The instability was highlighted when a Lufthansa flight to the Saudi capital Riyadh diverted to Cairo over safety concerns, a day after an Air France flight made a similar move.

The turnaround “reflects the instability in the region and the complexity of repatriation operations,” French Transport Minister Philippe Tabarot said. Britain’s first repatriation flight from Oman landed at London’s Stansted Airport after delays, with similar flights for other European nations arriving or en route.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency extended a warning about high risks to air traffic in the region until March 11.

The limited operations have hit travellers on key routes from Europe to the Asia-Pacific particularly hard. Gulf carriers Emirates, Qatar Airways and Etihad normally fly about one-third of all passengers between Europe and Asia.

Traffic at Dubai’s DXB, the world’s busiest international airport, remained at only 25 per cent of normal levels, according to flight-tracking website Flightradar24.

Mideast airlines begin cautious flight resumption amid regional tensions

MAJOR airlines across the Middle East are beginning a cautious and complex resumption of flights after widespread airspace closures linked to regional tensions temporarily grounded the global aviation hub, though operations in Qatar remain severely restricted.

Key carriers, including Emirates, Etihad Airways and flydubai, have started operating limited schedules from the United Arab Emirates.

However, the situation remains fluid, with a significant number of cancellations still in effect and airlines universally advising passengers not to travel to airports without a confirmed and valid booking.

The disruption stems from temporary airspace closures over parts of the Middle East, with airlines taking precautionary measures amid the Iran conflict.

In the UAE, Dubai International Airport (DXB) and Al Maktoum International (DWC) have reopened, according to a statement from Dubai Airports.

The Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways resumed a limited commercial flight schedule from March 6, operating to

a lengthy list of destinations including cities in Europe, Asia and North America.

“The decision has been taken in coordination with relevant authorities following extensive safety and security assessments,” Etihad said in a statement.

Dubai’s flagship carrier, Emirates, also confirmed it had resumed operations. “Passengers who have confirmed bookings for this afternoon’s flights may proceed to the airport,” the airline advised.

The situation in Qatar, however, remains significantly different. Qatar Airways’ scheduled flight operations are still suspended due to the closure of Qatari airspace. An update is expected on March 8 by 9am Doha time.

The Qatar Civil Aviation Authority announced a “partial resumption of air navigation in Qatar, through designated navigational contingency routes with limited operational capacity”, clarifying these initial flights are for passenger evacuation and air cargo and “do not include scheduled flights to and from Doha”.

In a highly controlled measure, Qatar Airways operated special inbound flights from London and Frankfurt on March 7,



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with flights from Paris, Madrid, Rome, and Bangkok planned for March 8.

The airline also organised outbound repatriation flights on March 7 to five European cities, with priority given to families, the elderly and those with urgent needs.

Elsewhere in the region, Oman Air and SalamAir have announced significant cancellations. Oman Air suspended all flights from March 9 to March 11 to and from Amman, Dubai, Bahrain, Doha, Dammam, Kuwait, Copenhagen, Baghdad and Khasab due to the ongoing disruptions.

SalamAir suspended flights to Iraq, Lebanon and Iran until March 28, while services to several Gulf cities are on hold until March 20.

Saudia, the flag carrier of Saudi Arabia, announced a partial resumption of flights to and from Dubai, beginning with limited services connecting Riyadh and Jeddah with the Emirati hub.

Bahrain's Gulf Air has not released a formal update, but data from its website showed widespread cancellations. An update from the Bahrain International Airport's X account confirmed its airspace remained temporarily closed.

The ripple effect of the airspace closures has been felt keenly in South Asia.

In Pakistan, flight schedules to and from the Middle East present a mixed picture of cancellations and operational flights, according to data from several websites including FlightRadar24 and Flightaware.

At Karachi's Jinnah International Airport, an Emirates flight from Dubai was scheduled to arrive, while a Qatar Airways flight from Doha and a flydubai flight were cancelled.

For departures, flights to Jeddah and Sharjah were scheduled to operate.

At Lahore's Allama Iqbal International Airport, the disruption was also evident.

A Qatar Airways flight from Doha was cancelled, while flights from Emirates and Etihad were listed as scheduled. On the departure list, a Pakistan International Airlines flight to Dubai was cancelled, while services to Doha, Abu Dhabi and Jeddah were scheduled.

Separately, according to flight information from Allama Iqbal Airport, Emirates flight EK 622 is expected to arrive early tomorrow morning from Dubai. The flight for March 7 has already arrived.

At Jinnah Airport, Emirates flight EK 602 is scheduled to arrive tonight, but it has not yet taken off from Dubai. The status of tomorrow's scheduled flights remains unconfirmed.

PIA privatization finalized

Rejecting all objections from workers' unions, the Ministry of Privatisation has issued a speaking order for the completion of the process for the privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA).

In a detailed decision under directives of the Lahore High Court, Privatisation Secretary Hammad Hashmi wrote that the entire process leading to the privatisation of the national flag carrier was completed under the law, and none of the objections raised by the workers' union "Peoples' Unity" and others had any legal standing.

"None of the allegations raised by the petitioners/objectors establishes any constitutional violation, statutory breach, arbitrariness, mala fide, or infringement of fundamental rights. The privatisation of PIACL has been undertaken within the bounds of constitutional authority, statutory mandate, and settled principles governing the privatisation process under the privatisation laws and regulations. These petitions are dismissed," he wrote, effectively closing all disputes.

Ministry rejects workers' objections, cites compliance with law

On Jan 23, the Lahore High Court had ordered the petitioners to appear before the privatisation secretary who was required to hear them out and issue a speaking order.

The secretary rejected the objection that privatisation should have been placed before the Council of Common Interest as required under Article 154 of the constitution, saying the CCI approval was already in the field, given its inclusion in the sale list. "The transaction squarely falls within the executive authority of the Federation under Article 173 of the constitution, which expressly empowers the Federal Government to dispose of its property and to make contracts," the order held.

Mr Hashmi also rejected the objection regarding a violation of Section 3(3) of the PIAC Conversation Act 2016, saying the said section was removed by Parliament through an amendment in 2023. The privatisation process, having been initiated after the removal of the statutory restriction, was, therefore, fully compliant with the prevailing legal framework.

The secretary also rejected the allegation of undervaluation of PIA's international and domestic slots. The objectors had claimed a Rs270bn value for international slots and Rs19bn for domestic slots. However, the secretary

noted that these assertions were unsupported by any credible material, independent valuation report, or admissible evidence. Bald figures stated in pleadings, without substantiation, cannot form the basis for judicial interference in a commercial transaction.

SIAL holds EC meeting



The Executive Committee meeting of Sialkot International Airport Limited was presided over by the Vice Chairman, Mr. Waqas Afzal, with esteemed members of the committee actively participating. During the session, key matters of strategic and operational importance were deliberated in detail. The meeting reviewed ongoing initiatives, assessed performance updates, and discussed future plans aimed at further strengthening service standards and organizational efficiency. The meeting concluded with a collective resolve to continue working in the best interest of the airport and its valued stakeholders.



Mr. Sohail Barlas Convener of Terminal Building Committee presides a meeting at SIAL.

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SIAL inaugurates facilitation desk for AJK passengers

Sialkot International Airport continues to strengthen its commitment to passenger convenience by inaugurating a dedicated Special Facilitation Desk for travellers from Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK). The desk was jointly inaugurated by Chairman SIAL, Hassan Ali Bhatti, and President Mirpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Umar Jarral, during a ceremony held at the airport.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Vice Chairman SIAL, Waqas Afzal, former Chairman SIAL, Mian Naeem Javed, CEO SIAL, AVM Tanweer Ashraf Bhatti, along with senior officials of SIAL. Former Chairman from the Mirpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mr. Javed Iqbal Ch, Former President MCCI Sabir Hussain Ch, Secretary General MCCI Khawaja Yameen, Executive Member Murtaza Ali Kalas followed by others also took part in the auspicious occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairman SIAL, Hassan Ali Bhatti, stated that the Special Facilitation Desk has been established on the request of President Mirpur Chamber, Umar Jarral, and in the larger interest of the people of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. He emphasized that a significant number of passengers from AJK prefer Sialkot International Airport for their travel needs. He further highlighted that the airport, owing to its strategic geographical location, serves not only Sialkot but also facilitates passengers from AJK and neighbouring cities, ensuring ease, accessibility, and efficient passenger services.

President Mirpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Umar Jarral, expressed his appreciation for the proactive and passenger-centric role of Sialkot International Airport. He acknowledged the airport management's thoughtful initiative of establishing the facilitation desk, stating that the people of Kashmir have long relied on Sialkot Airport as their preferred gateway due to its proximity, convenience, and quality services. He also added that Sialkot Intl Airport will get a special desk at Mirpur Chamber of Commerce too.

The establishment of the Special Facilitation Desk reflects Sialkot International Airport's continued dedication to enhancing passenger experience, strengthening regional connectivity, and serving the wider community with professionalism and care.



The Chairman of SIAL, Mr. Hassan Ali Bhatti, and the president of Mirpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr. Umar Jarral, along with others, inaugurate the facilitation desk at a ceremony held at SIAL.



Facilitation Desk to serve passengers from Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) inaugurated at Sialkot International Airport.



Expanding Iran conflict triggers downfall of airline stocks



Airline stocks around the world have taken a tumble following widespread airspace closures that have hampered Middle Eastern aviation. Two of the most affected airports, Dubai International airport and Doha Hamad International Airport, have seen more than 11,000 flights canceled, displacing thousands of passengers worldwide.

Following rising geopolitical tensions in the region, airline stocks took a dip on Monday after airlines were forced to cancel or reroute thousands of flights, affecting airlines not only in the Middle East but around the world. United Airlines, the largest international carrier in the United States, as reported by CNBC, saw its stock drop almost 4%.

An Ongoing Geopolitical Situation



While international travel has previously seen strong demand and growth following the COVID-19 pandemic, the international air transport sector is highly volatile, with such tension now escalating to the boiling point, quickly crippling worldwide aviation operations, and as a result, share-market volatility. Emirates and Qatar Airways have primarily hit the headlines for their operations effectively being grounded due to the conflict.

In the United States, the 'Big Three' legacy carriers are also starting to feel the pinch. Over the last week, 11,000 flights to and from the Middle East were canceled, and while neither nor fly to the region, their stock dropped, according to Business Insider. European and Asian carriers are also feeling the hit, as detailed below.

Airline	Stock % Drop
American Airlines	6%
United Airlines	4%
Delta Air Lines	3.5%
IAG (British Airways, Aer Lingus, Iberia, Vueling, LEVEL)	5%
Air France KLM	9%
Lufthansa	6%
Qantas	5%
Cathay Pacific	5%
Singapore Airlines	5%
Japan Airlines	5%

Middle Eastern carriers Emirates, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways are all owned entirely by their respective governments. This means that they are not publicly listed.

An Important Aviation Corridor



As reported by the New York Times, the escalating conflict resulted in some governments shutting down major international airlines, Emirates and Qatar Airways. These two carriers provide an extensive network of flights connecting Australasia with Europe, Africa, and North/South America. It is estimated that around 660,000 passengers travel through the Middle East every day.

The Middle East is an important aviation corridor, primarily due to closed Russian airspace, sending airlines south of the world's largest country and primarily over the Caucasus and Middle Eastern countries. This conflict and closure of airspace over Iran have seen airlines scrambling to reroute, with many thousands of flights canceled entirely.

The weekend strikes on Iran by the United States have seen retaliation across the region. While US President, Trump, believes these attacks may last up to five weeks, this has sent oil prices surging and reduced shipments through the usually

busy Strait of Hormuz to a 'trickle'. Oil prices are now up 13% when compared to the same time.



Middle East Airspace Plunges Into Chaos Afer US-Israel Strikes on Iran Eight countries and counting have shut their airspace to all flights.



Middle East Airspace Plunges Into Chaos Afer US-Israel Strikes on Iran Eight countries and counting have shut their airspace to all flights.

Stocks have tumbled as markets opened on Monday, with Reuters suggesting that more than \$22.6 billion was shredded across major carriers. It is expected that weeks of travel disruption could continue following the US. The Iran-Israel conflict. Ongoing costs for airlines, including rising fuel prices, rerouting, and flight cancellation expenses, are set to impact airlines' bottom lines. While the aviation scene remains subdued in the Middle East, the effects are being felt elsewhere.

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Iran conflict disrupts global shipping as tankers are stranded

Insurance companies are cancelling war risk coverage for vessels in the Middle East Gulf as the widening Iran conflict disrupts shipping, leaving tankers damaged or stranded and at least two people dead.

Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz between Iran and Oman, which carries around one-fifth of oil consumed globally as well as large quantities of gas, has ground to a near halt after vessels in the area were hit as Iran retaliated against US and Israeli strikes.

One tanker in the region was ablaze on Monday 2 March, at least four others were damaged and about 150 ships were stranded. The disruption and fears of prolonged closure have caused oil and European natural gas prices to jump, with Brent crude futures up as much as 13pc as the conflict triggered multiple oil and gas shutdowns in the Middle East.

At least 150 vessels including oil and liquefied natural gas tankers had dropped anchor in the Strait of Hormuz and surrounding waters, shipping data showed on Sunday. About 10pc of the world's container ships are ensnared in the broader backups, and cargo could soon start piling up at ports and transshipment hubs in Europe and Asia, Jeremy Nixon, CEO of container carrier Ocean Network Express, known as ONE, said. Iran has said it closed navigation through the critical waterway, prompting Asian governments and refiners to assess oil stockpiles.

The tankers were clustered in open waters off the coasts of major Gulf oil producers, including Iraq and Saudi Arabia, as well as LNG giant Qatar, according to ship-tracking data from the Marine Traffic platform.

Insurers cancel war risk cover

As a result of the incidents, marine insurers are cancelling war risk coverage for vessels, and oil shipping rates are set to surge further. Companies including Gard, Skuld, NorthStandard, the London P&I Club and the American Club said their cancellations would take effect from March 5, according to notices dated March 1 on their websites.

These cancellation notices mean shipping companies with vessels in the region will need to seek new insurance cover at higher rates to maintain policies. "As a result of this fast-moving situation, each underwriter is invariably increasing rates or in some instances, for vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz, even declining to offer terms right now," said David Smith, head of marine with brokers McGill and Partners.

Meanwhile, costs of shipping oil

from the Middle East to Asia — already at six-year highs — are set to rise further as the widening Iran conflict is deterring shipowners from sending vessels to the region, market sources and analysts said.

Aramco to reroute exports

Saudi oil giant Aramco is attempting to reroute some of its crude exports to the Red Sea to bypass the Strait of Hormuz where the risk of attacks has slowed shipping to a near halt, sources recently.

The world's largest oil firm hopes to avert production cuts by rerouting oil to its Red Sea port of Yanbu but sources, including buyers, traders and analysts, said the East-West Pipeline had limited capacity and could become a target of attacks by Iran's allies.

The pipeline has a capacity of 5 million barrels per day (bpd) and in 2019 was able to temporarily handle 7 million bpd after natural gas liquid pipelines were converted to carry crude. Saudi Arabia produced just over 10 million bpd of crude in January, according to OPEC secondary sources.

Aramco has informed some buyers of its Arab Light crude that they must load

cargoes at Yanbu, three sources said, adding the company will assess demand and crude availability and inform the buyers. "There are logistical trade-offs involved, including the reduction of NGLs takeaway capacity and what rate the Yanbu crude terminal on the Red Sea can sustainably load vessels at," said Richard Bronze, co-founder of consultancy Energy Aspects.

Shipping route safety

China called on all sides in the Middle East war to maintain safety in the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping route for oil and gas, and vowed measures to ensure its energy security.

"China urges all parties to immediately cease military operations, avoid further escalation of tensions, maintain the safety of shipping lanes in the Strait of Hormuz, and prevent a greater impact on the global economy," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told a regular news conference recently. "Energy security is of great importance to the global economy... China will take necessary measures to ensure its energy security," she said.

Pakistan to facilitate stranded ships and expedite clearance of 50,000 containers



Pakistan is working to assist stranded ships at its ports and expedite the clearance of around 50,000 containers for importers and exporters, according to sources. The government plans to provide terminals and streamline operations to address the backlog.

Pakistan is taking steps to assist ships currently stranded at its ports and is working to expedite the clearance of approximately 50,000 containers belonging to importers and exporters, according to sources familiar with the matter.

Officials have indicated that the government plans to provide terminals to facilitate the movement and processing of these vessels. The initiative aims to address the backlog and ensure smoother operations at the ports, which have been

affected by the accumulation of containers and delayed ship movements.

Reports suggest that authorities are coordinating efforts to rescue the containers, which are critical for both import and export activities. The measures under consideration include streamlining terminal operations and enhancing coordination between relevant agencies to accelerate the release of goods.

According to sources, the government is prioritizing the resolution of these logistical challenges to support the business community and maintain the flow of trade. The facilitation of stranded ships and the clearance of containers are expected to reduce congestion at the ports and improve overall efficiency in the supply chain.

Officials have not provided a specific timeline for when the backlog will be cleared but emphasized that efforts are ongoing. The situation is being closely monitored, and further steps may be taken as needed to ensure that port operations return to normal.

Stakeholders in the import and export sectors have expressed hope that the government's measures will help mitigate the impact of the delays and restore confidence in the country's trade infrastructure.



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Karachi port tranship to UAE



Containers are discharged at Karachi Port as transhipment begins on Friday 6 March, supporting regional and global trade amid geopolitical tensions.

Amid the ongoing crisis in the Middle East arising out of US and Israeli aggression against Iran, the Karachi port has commenced transhipment of goods to the United Arab Emirates.

The large vessels carrying containers do not visit each regional port and instead drop off containers destined for nearby countries at some hubs.

The UAE had become a hub for such large vessels over the past several decades, and goods destined for Pakistan, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and some East African countries were transported to their destinations via feeder ships.

However, amid ongoing attacks on Iran by the US Navy and closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran, the shipping lines have decided to drop UAE-bound cargo at Karachi.

Two cargo ships MV TS Tacoma and MV TS Sydney arrived at Karachi on Friday 6 March and discharged a large number of containers belonging to TS Line, Heung-A, Sinokor and many NVOCCS as transhipment cargo.

The containers will subsequently be transhipped from Karachi to Jebel Ali in the Middle East.

Karachi Port Trust Chairman, retired Rear Admiral Shahid Ahmed, has reaffirmed the commitment to supporting uninterrupted regional and global trade amid the evolving geopolitical situation in the Middle East.

Currently, the transhipment cargoes have been placed at terminals within the port limits, while the Pakistan Ships Agent Association (PSAA) has asked the government to facilitate the transhipment cargoes by placing them at 'off-dock'

terminals situated at Hawkesbay, Mauripur, and Port Qasim.

PSAA Chairman Muhammad Rajpar stated that the signs do not suggest the

Strait of Hormuz will open in the coming days, and that the volume of transhipment cargoes is expected to continue increasing over time.

Trade pact signed with Cambodia



COMMERCE Minister Jam Kamal Khan and his Cambodian counterpart Cham Nimul exchange copies of the joint statement following the second JTC meeting.

Pakistan and Cambodia on Wednesday 11 Feb. signed an agreement between their trade promotion organisations (TPOs) at the conclusion of the second meeting of the Joint Trade Committee (JTC).

The agreement was signed by Commerce Minister Jam Kamal and Cambodia's Minister of Commerce Cham Nimul, who co-chaired the meeting held in the capital.

Mr Kamal said the JTC had served as a structured and effective platform for reviewing progress, addressing challenges, and exploring new avenues for cooperation. While noting encouraging growth in bilateral trade, he underscored the considerable untapped potential in market access, investment and sectoral collaboration.

He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to advancing discussions on a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) to improve market access and diversify trade baskets.

During the meeting, Pakistan highlighted the export potential of rice, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and agricultural products, while Cambodia identified opportunities in cassava, cashew nuts, footwear, and rubber products. Both sides agreed to facilitate direct engagement between their business communities to

translate these complementarities into tangible trade flows.

The Board of Investment presented opportunities in energy, information technology, tourism and infrastructure, positioning Pakistan as a gateway to Central Asia.

Cambodia, for its part, outlined incentives under its new investment law and Special Economic Zones (SEZs), proposing itself as a strategic production base for Pakistani enterprises seeking access to Asean and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) markets.

The two sides agreed to expand cooperation in multiple sectors. In agriculture, they decided to establish a technical working group. In aviation, they agreed to nominate focal persons to advance an Air Services Agreement. They also resolved to exchange focal points for a double taxation avoidance agreement and explore memorandums of understanding in health cooperation.

Other areas of collaboration include standards and conformity assessment, cooperation in the non-bank financial sector, information and communication technology — particularly digital transformation, artificial intelligence and cyber security — as well as labour and vocational training exchanges.

PM Shehbaz woos Uzbek investors



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Uzbekistan President Mirziyoyev Shavkat Miromonovich witness the exchange of memoranda of understanding.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday 6 Feb. invited Uzbek business firms to explore investment opportunities in Pakistan's textile, pharmaceutical, mining, agriculture, and tourism sectors, as private sector entities from both countries signed MoUs worth \$3.4 billion for B2B cooperation.

The prime minister, addressing the Pakistan-Uzbekistan Business Forum held along with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who is on a two-day state visit, said that both sides had signed a protocol on Friday to achieve an “ambitious yet easily achievable” target of increasing bilateral trade to \$2bn in five years.

At the forum attended by the ministers and businessmen from both sides, the two leaders assured the investors to provide a conducive business environment with no room for systemic hurdles.

Both leaders welcomed the B2B deals with the Uzbek president, calling it “very much achievable” because both sides had a very good program already drafted and established.

Pakistan, Uzbekistan ink \$3.4bn deals, target \$2bn trade milestone

“I am here, of course, as Prime Minister of Pakistan, but for this forum as the CEO of Pakistan. I am just a telephone call away. My colleagues are just a telephone call away. We will remove any bottleneck or impediment on the way.

And I would like to assure you that bureaucracy and red tapism will not create any kind of hurdle in your business proposals,” Prime Minister Shehbaz committed. Recalling his participation in a similar business forum last year in Tashkent, he said the deliberations there had led the bilateral trade to \$450 million

during the last year, which was still far below the potential.

He expressed the hope that President Mirziyoyev's visit would go a long way to strengthen bilateral relations and convert them into a level of unprecedented economic cooperation.

Referring to the signing of \$2bn trade protocol, he said that Pakistan-Uzbekistan relations would now be measured by trade flows, investment projects, industrial partnerships and people-to-people exchanges.

He said both countries would form a working group to come up with a roadmap of five years to promote trade, investment portfolio, and joint collaborations in research and development, IT, and agriculture.

Highlighting his government's achievements on the economic front, he said the country had transitioned from a period of severe physical turbulence in 2023 to an improved economic conditions with the inflation rate down from over 30pc to a single digit, banking policy rate from 22.5pc to 10.5pc, and IT sector exports are touching \$3.8bn exports. Shehbaz said Pakistan and Uzbekistan stood to benefit immensely from each others strengths in key sectors.

In his remarks, President Mirziyoyev said that the business forum reflected the long-standing shared intentions and deep mutual understanding.

Calling the business community a “true bridge” between two nations, he said that through the \$2bn trade protocol, both sides had committed to zero corruption, no bottlenecks, and no obstacles.

He said Uzbekistan needed Pakistan's expertise and high-quality in the pharmaceutical sector, affordable medicines and offered 10-year tax exemptions, support, and all conducive conditions.

He told the gathering that Uzbekistan had around 30 high-tech textile enterprises awaiting Pakistani management and expertise to access world markets, and also expressed his country's strong interest in collaborations in leather goods.

Regarding mining cooperation, he said Uzbek relevant ministry was ready to finalize action plans and that his country had a growing demand for rice, potatoes, processed meat and was open to joint ventures, land allocation, and cooperation in seed production.

Centre plans to make Gwadar a trade, tourism hub

Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Dr Ahsan Iqbal on Tuesday 10 Feb. said that this year marked a turning point for Gwadar and that the federal government was taking concrete steps to develop the port city as a centre of the blue economy, trade and regional connectivity.

Presiding over a high-level meeting, the minister added that the development of Balochistan was integral to Pakistan's overall progress and stressed that the time had come to place Gwadar firmly on the path to global prominence.

The meeting discussed the pathways to a Modern Coastal City initiative aimed at developing Gwadar into a world-class, sustainable city for trade, tourism and investment, while promoting the blue economy.

The meeting was held in Islamabad and attended by Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) Chairman Noor-ul-Haq Baloch, heads of the Planning Commission, Gwadar Development Authority (GDA), Port Qasim Authority, Karachi Port Trust, and other relevant federal and provincial departments. GDA Director General Moin-ur-Rahman Khan joined the meeting via video link.

Minister Ahsan Iqbal says this year marks a turning point for coastal city's development

The GPA chairman briefed the participants on the operationalisation of Gwadar Port, coastal tourism, fisheries development, aquaculture, establishment of a shipyard, tax-free zones, sustainable water and energy solutions, and employment opportunities for youth.

Recommendations were made to complete eight ongoing resorts under the Balochistan Coastal Development Authority, prepare a comprehensive coastal tourism master plan, establish clear land-use and zoning frameworks, and promote public-private partnerships (PPP) to attract investment, including international hotel chains through tax incentives and other packages.

The meeting also focused on infrastructure and connectivity projects, including the Gwadar 2026 Roadshow, transshipment negotiations through Gwadar Port, introduction of a minimum weekly Islamabad — Gwadar flight, the Nokundi — Gwadar railway link, feasibility studies for the proposed Gwadar — Sohar underwater tunnel and maritime corridor, and the launch of a ferry service with Oman.

Govt urged to take advantage of Gwadar Port amid Iran war

As the Iran war disrupts regional shipping routes, the government was urged to utilise Gwadar Port for its strategic location, improve competitiveness and cost rationalisation at other ports, besides improving operational efficiency and turnaround time for vessels and cargo.

A meeting between shipping stakeholders and relevant government departments on March 6 unanimously agreed on the strategic utilisation of Gwadar Port. It was chaired by the director general of the Ports and Shipping Wing and attended by officials from the port authorities, Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC), the National Logistics Corporation (NLC), and representatives of shipping lines operating in Pakistan.

The meeting noted that Gwadar was presently one of the most peaceful and strategically located ports in the region. The participants said that the available capacity and facilities at Gwadar Port should be actively utilised and marketed to international shipping lines. Shipping agents may engage with major carriers, particularly COSCO Shipping Lines, to encourage the routing of transshipment and transit cargo through Gwadar.

It was also discussed the availability of transshipment and bunkering facilities at Pakistani ports, the imposition of additional surcharges by shipping lines, the routing of Pakistani cargo through regional ports, and possible options for managing cargo currently affected by regional disruptions.

It was unanimously observed that port charges in Pakistan were comparatively higher than those at competing regional ports. In order to capitalise on the evolving regional maritime situation, it was emphasised that costs must be rationalised to woo shipping lines.

Participants believed that super taxes and other fiscal measures imposed by the Federal Board of Revenue negatively affected trade competitiveness and called for their review or rationalisation.

The members clarified that additional surcharges imposed by shipping lines largely stemmed from increased war risk insurance premiums, as Pakistan had been categorised as a higher-risk region due to geopolitical developments. To address this issue, the government may consider providing sovereign guarantees or engaging diplomatically through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Pakistan's High Commission in London with Lloyd's Register and clarify that Pakistan was not

directly involved in the ongoing conflict and therefore the war risk premium should be reassessed and removed.

Port-related processes

The participants noted that port-related processes required further streamlining to improve operational efficiency and reduce turnaround time for vessels and cargo. It was observed that on-dock container terminals were facing capacity constraints, particularly due to long-stay cargo and Afghan transit cargo. In order to optimise port capacity, such cargo may be shifted to off-dock terminals. It was recommended that off-dock terminals be utilised more effectively to maximise cargo handling capacity and reduce congestion within port terminals.

Shipping agents also highlighted that while larger container vessels were accommodated, adequate berth windows and operational support should also be ensured for smaller vessels to maintain service diversity. In addition to containerised cargo, break-bulk cargo already available at ports should also be considered and facilitated for transshipment operations. The potential role of the PNSC may be explored in facilitating cargo movement through arrangements such as tonnage charter, which may help reduce cost pressures.

Participants emphasised for policy facilitation through Pakistan Customs and the FBR to support transshipment and transit trade. Any necessary relaxations may be introduced through appropriate SROs within the existing legal framework. It was suggested that inter-terminal and inter-port movement of cargo be allowed to enhance operational flexibility.

Transshipment activity

The meeting also recommended allowing ship-to-ship (STS) operations for oil cargo, which would enhance Pakistan's capability to handle petroleum transshipment. Mandatory scanning requirements for transshipment cargo, particularly at off-dock terminals, may be reviewed and aligned with international best practices to reduce unnecessary delays and encourage transshipment activity. This may be clarified through an appropriate SRO.

Existing restrictions, which limit vessels from calling at both Indian and Pakistani ports in quick succession, may be reviewed to introduce operational flexibility and enable Pakistani ports to attract more transshipment business.

Exports contract 8.76pc in February

Pakistan's merchandise exports slipped back into negative territory in February, reversing a brief recovery seen a month earlier and raising fresh concerns about the outlook for overseas shipments amid escalating tensions in the Middle East.

The setback follows five consecutive months of contraction, with exports showing a modest rise in January, offering cautious optimism that a recovery might be taking shape. That momentum, however, proved short-lived as February data signalled renewed pressure on the external sector.

Trade analysts warn that the unfolding crisis in the Middle East could weigh further on export performance, particularly by disrupting trade routes, dampening demand in key regional markets, and adding uncertainty to global supply chains.

With geopolitical risks mounting, exporters now face heightened volatility in the months ahead. In absolute terms, export proceeds fell 8.76pc to \$2.27 billion in February from \$2.49bn a year ago, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) said on Tuesday 3 March.

On a month-on-month basis, export proceeds dipped by 25.63pc in February. Negative growth in exports has continued since August of the current fiscal year, except in July, when proceeds grew by 16.43pc year on year. Export earnings posted negative growth, with proceeds declining by 20.41pc in December. This follows a 14.54pc drop in November, 4.46pc in October, 3.88pc in September, and 12.49pc in August, reflecting persistent pressures on the country's external trade performance. However, in January, exports posted a modest 3.3pc growth.

In the first eight months (July-February), export proceeds recorded negative growth of 7.30pc, falling to \$20.46bn from \$22.07bn in the corresponding period last year. Last month, the government announced several measures, including a reduction in energy rates, to minimise pressure on the country's trade performance.

Currently, the exporters are grappling with subdued global markets and the high cost of doing business in the country. The textile exporters have already complained about contractions owing to the high cost of doing business. In FY25, export proceeds rose 4.67pc to \$32.106bn against \$30.675bn in the preceding year.



Highest Mountains of the World

Prof. Safdar Sandal

It is an important and interesting subject for everyone to get knowledge of the existing highest mountains of the world. Personally speaking too, most of my contemporary friends have claimed about me that I am very fond of mountains, a friendly gossip though but it is true to some extent that I am very fond of mountains whether they in Alps or Himalaya –ranges which I have visited too, albeit not scaled. . May be it is natural on my part to have the passion to write on the subject. The present effort is part of that. About the relating study and writing on it; I have decided today to pen down on the subject after of course it may be taken as a maiden attempt and a rudimentary effort which has followed accordingly; although it has sufficed only a part of my awareness on the subject which may kindly be respected accepted. Fondness of my scares writing is also due



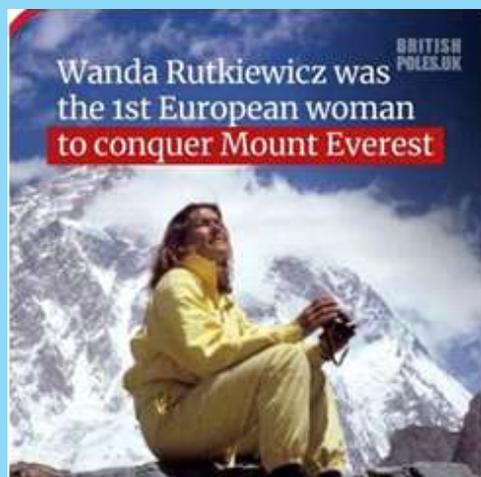
number of attempts each year now exceeds 1,000. The first two men, known in history, were Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay who reached on the top of Everest in 1953. After this event,

performing the venture. Being situated in the Himalayas, the 'Mount Everest' has become a great source of income to for the country 'Nepal' too, where it is situated.

The second biggest mountain of the world is K-2. This is known as the most Dangerous Peak, situated in the Karakoram Mountains. K-2 is an incredible mountain located in the Karakorum Range bordering Pakistan and China. It is the second-highest peak in the world and has been a major challenge for climbers. Its height is 8,611 meters. In 1954, it was for the first time conquered by Acille Compagnoni with his colleague Lino Lecedelli as part of an Italian expedition on July 31, 1954 led by Ardito Desio. These climbers belonged to Italy.

The first woman climber of 'Mount Everest' has been Pakistan's Samina Baig. Hers was a remarkable achievement and this achievement has earned her an international recognition, fame and accolades, including the 'Pride of Performance' award honoured for her successful ascent of 'Everest' in 2013 at the age of 21. She is an inspiration to many, especially the young Pakistani girls and boys. She continued with her passion and scaled the 'K-2 Summit' on July 16, 2022 adding another feather in her cap'. Samina is undoubtedly a great and adorable pride for Pakistan. It was due to the continuous bad weather and it was after 23 years, that she could perform the arduous deed of scaling 'Everest' successfully and this time she was in the accompany of some world-wide mountaineers.

The Hollywood film " K-2" was produced in 1991 and the 2,000 year's film "Vertical Limit" had made the summit 'K-2' to achieve an international fame by filming a Romance Story' and entire world-popularity which made the mountain also to become a 'top notches' of international repute _portraying a 'Beauty



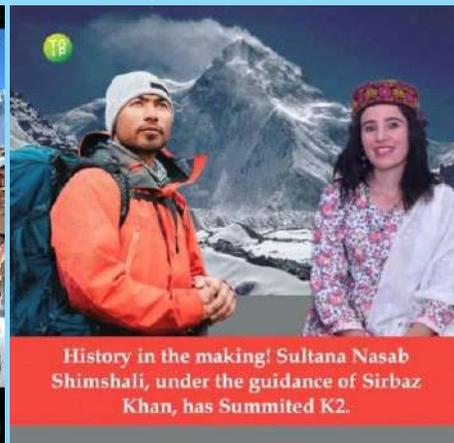
to the importance, reverence and space allowed to me by the magnificent authorities of the magazine, Flyer*, I undertake the subject with submission :

Mount -'Everest'

Mount Everest is the highest mountain of the world. Its height is 8,848 meters and it is situated in Nepal. There has been a discussion of some other peak to be higher but with certain geographical reasons 'Mount Everest has been agreed upon to be the highest, in accordance with scientific conclusions. This mountain occupies a unique attraction among the mountaineers. More than 340 mountaineers have lost their lives in conquering this peak and as of 2024; approximately 7,269 mountaineers had reached the top. The effort continues among many more aspirants which have been 12,884 successful ascents. The



thousands of hikers have scaled 'Everest' and among woman 'Wanda Rutkiewicz' was the first European woman (from Poland) to conquer Mount Everest. Meanwhile, thousands of people have tried this venture again and are still



History in the making! Sultana Nasab Shimshali, under the guidance of Sirbaz Khan, has Summited K2.



believers come to visit or pay homage to this mountain. Similar beliefs or religious respect is also held for some other mountains of the world which we shall try to enumerate here, with possible omissions if any, which may be pardoned..

' ' M o u n t Kailash"

The next in the same category

living in paradise, physically they perish there but continue living spiritually. (Kindly I may be pardoned for any incorrect punctuation and of course there more than one schools of religious thought and therefore I stand forgivable). Hindus and Jainism believe that by performing a round trip of the mountain washes their sins of life. One circle is completed in ten days and to climb the mountain successfully, is the most difficult job and of course a point of salvation for the believers of their respective creeds.

The 'kailash' tribe of Pakistan has an independent mythology of their own which is thought to be of Greek Origin (although it is contested too for various reasons, since the blood grouping differs from those of the Greek people). I have dwelt a lot on this subject in some of my previous articles and I feel confused too on the ground of history-probabilities which are no less factual. So, here I suffice with the most interesting part of the story. About 'Kailashi' people I feel proud to have their presence in my culturally rich country - Pakistan. They are here from 3,025 years or from the time when 'Alexander the Conqueror' came to this part of the world from Macedonia (near Greece) and there is no denial of this fact in the history-books. The people of Pakistan have inherited a multiple origin of many Western nations' and cultures. More known is the Arian race that originated in Central Asia and they migrated to India and some parts migrated to southern Europe (like Munich or Bavarian region). During my travels, I have eagerly found many commonalities in habits, words and way of life.

and Enchantment'.. through Hollywood films.

(Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward in the film "Snows of Kilimanjaro")

I did not know what 'Kilimanjaro' is, until I saw the Hollywood film 'Snows of Kilimanjaro' in New Pearl Cinema of Sialkot in 1955(the film was made in 1952). I had just joined Murray College, Sialkot and was a student of 1st Year at that time. Needless to say that I was very fond of seeing Hollywood English films and this film attracted me a lot due to its unique name and the mountain not known to me before. Most prominent actors of the film were Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward(also my favourites'). I still recollect their supreme performance in the film.

"Kilimanjaro" has a beautiful and romantic name and a beautiful scene is of the lake, as well. This is Africa's highest mountain and is situated on the border between Kenya and Tanzania. Its height is 5,891 meters and is covered by snow all the year around. Its unique feature is its solitude. It stands all alone and is not neighbored or connected by any chain or sequence of mountains. Due to the whole world's atmospheric change, its snow is gradually melting and it is feared that until 2050, the snow on the mountain may disappear.. (due to the climatic phenomenon which this planet is facing ..)*. Kilimanjaro is a 'dormant volcano mount' too. It is actually the highest peak in Africa and the 'highest free-standing mountain' of the world.

"Mount - Arrarat"

This mountain is situated in Eastern part of Turkey and is near to the border of Armenia. Its height is 5,137 meters from the sea level. 'Arrarat' is a volcanic mountain, particularly. Followers of different religions regard it as a "Sacred Mountain" which carries a spiritual importance or is considered to be connected with the soul *. Thousands of

which comes is the most beautiful mountain of the world named 'Kailash'. The mountain is shared in land by Pakistan and Tibet. The world famous tribe of 'Kailash' people is a rich property of the past, inherited by Pakistan. The height of the mountain is 6,638 meters. For Buddhists too and Hindus the mountain has a spiritual status. Hindus regard it highly sacred as being the abode of their 'God Shiva'. The Buddhists believe that 'God Talks' with the people who succeed to reach on the top. It is in essence a sacred journey for nearly four religions of the world. The people who succeed in the arduous journey and reach a point (not geographical); the God comes to them and speaks with them. Or in other words these successful people who have the most sacred opportunity to converse, or are able to have talked with the God ultimately do not return to the world and they start



Pakistan, Austria agree to further strengthen bilateral ties



Austria's Federal Chancellor Christian Stocker with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on February 16 in Vienna.

Austria's Chancellor Christian Stocker (C-R) and Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (C-L) attend a bilateral meeting during an official visit to Vienna, Austria on Feb 16, 2026.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Austria's Federal Chancellor Christian Stocker shake hands during a meeting with CEOs of Austrian and Pakistani businesses, in Vienna on Feb 16, 2026.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addresses the Pakistan-Austria Business Forum on February 16.

Austria's Federal Chancellor Christian Stocker with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on February 16 in Vienna.

Austria's Chancellor Christian Stocker (C-R) and Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (C-L) attend a bilateral meeting during an official visit to Vienna, Austria on Feb 16, 2026. —AFP

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Austria's Federal Chancellor Christian Stocker shake hands during a meeting with CEOs of Austrian and Pakistani businesses, in Vienna on Feb 16, 2026.

Pakistan and Austria on Monday 16 Feb. agreed to further strengthen bilateral ties as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met Chancellor Christian Stocker in Vienna.

PM Shehbaz arrived in Vienna a day earlier on a two-day visit, with the Foreign Office (FO) noting that it marked the first visit by a Pakistani prime minister to Austria since 1992.

PM Shehbaz and Stocker held a “restricted meeting” at the Federal Chancellery today, which was followed by delegation-level talks, a press release issued by media said.

The delegation talks included Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, Special Assistant to PM Tariq Fatemi, and Foreign Secretary Ambassador Amna Baloch.

The statement read: “Both leaders recalled the friendly and historic ties between the two countries and committed to work together more closely to further strengthen the bilateral relationship in diverse fields, including economic cooperation, trade and investment, tourism, hospitality, education, IT, healthcare and human resource development and mobility.

“To this end, they agreed to work for the early finalisation of MoUs (memoranda of understanding) under consideration related to these areas.”

The premier and the chancellor also “exchanged views on regional and global developments, and agreed on the central

role of the United Nations in addressing the challenges of peace and security, peaceful settlement of disputes, sustainable development, climate action and protection and promotion of human rights”.

“They expressed their shared commitment to multilateralism and appreciated mutual support for each other's candidatures, while working together with the international community for strengthening the UN system,” PID added.

PM Shehbaz thanked Stocker for the “meaningful and productive meetings” during the visit, which he said would lend fresh impetus to bilateral ties.

He also extended an invitation to the chancellor to undertake an official visit to Pakistan at his earliest convenience.

According to the PID statement, the premier and the chancellor co-chaired a meeting of chief executive officers (CEOs) from leading Austrian and Pakistani companies working in a wide range of areas.

“It was agreed to expand G2G (government to government), G2B (government to business) and B2B (business to business) engagements between the two countries through the effective utilisation of the existing platforms,” the statement read.

The prime minister invited the Austrian businesses and companies to participate in the upcoming EU-Pakistan Business Forum to be held in Islamabad in April this year.

PM Shehbaz and Austrian Federal Economic Chamber Vice President Carmen Goby also witnessed the signing ceremony of an MoU between Pakistani and Austrian companies.

In a post on X later, PM Shehbaz stressed that his visit “carries special significance as we are having a high-level visit after more than three decades”.

“It also coincides with the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Pakistan–Austria diplomatic relations,” he noted.

He termed the meeting with Stocker “most warm and productive”, reiterating that the two reaffirmed their countries' resolve to work closely in diverse fields.



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A train ride into the past



The special safari train stopped in the rocky terrain of the Lakki Hills near Sehwan, where folk artist Wahid Bux Fakhir performed as passengers watched and enjoyed the view.

THE dust clung to my shoes long after I had left Mohenjo-Daro after a short visit. On the train back home, as darkness settled outside the window, I found myself reflecting on how a civilisation 5,000 years old could be absorbed, or even understood, in just three hours.

Mohenjo-Daro, meaning 'Mound of the Dead', was built around 2,500 BCE in Sindh and was a major city of the Indus Valley Civilisation. Now a Unesco World Heritage Site, it is known for its grid-based planning, standardised baked-brick structures and advanced drainage system.

A visit to the historic site does not overwhelm you with noise. Rather, it stands in dignified silence, one that speaks.

The two-day trip, organised by the Sindh Tourism Development Corporation (STDC), was titled the 'Mohenjo-Daro Train Safari'.

On a Saturday 7 March morning at Karachi Cantonment Station, the special train stood at Platform No. 1, drawing curious glances from travellers and onlookers.

Gradually, the number of tourists both local and foreign increased, filling the platform with anticipation. Some photographed the decorated coaches while others took selfies or discussed the itinerary.

At around nine in the morning, the train's traditional horn reverberated across the platform. By nearly 10am, it began to move, marking the start of the safari.

In spirit and structure, it remained exactly that: a train safari. But inside the air-conditioned cabins, not everything was convenient.

There was no television or Wi-Fi, while mobile signals faltered repeatedly. The toilets also ran out of water at times. Several passengers said a simple informational booklet or short video about MohenjoDaro's layout and history could have added depth to the experience.

Despite these shortcomings, the charm of train travel was felt by many.

When the train reached Kotri Junction under the afternoon sun, Sindh's Minister for Culture and Tourism Zulfiqar Ali Shah, who had inaugurated the safari and travelled from Karachi with the passengers, disembarked after bidding farewell. Through hills and shrines As the train crossed Lakki Shah Saddar, the terrain shifted. Scenic arid hills appeared on one side and the N-55 highway on the other.

The train paused briefly amid the hills, allowing passengers to step out and enjoy the views. Cameras came out quickly.

At the stop, artists from the STDC performed a traditional Sindhi dance atop a mound, drawing warm appreciation from tourists.

The train then resumed its journey and arrived at Sehwan, where we were welcomed to the beat of drums and taken by mini-coasters to the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. At around 5pm, the train departed for Larkana, where the group was greeted with flower petals and warm hospitality.

The land that speaks On Sunday 8 March morning, mustard fields glowed yellow on the outskirts of Larkana as our journey towards Mohenjo-Daro began.

Before entering the heritage site, we passed a well-maintained park. To the right stood a preserved vehicle once used by Sir John Marshall, the English archaeologist who oversaw the excavation of Mohenjo-Daro in 1922, while a bull cart stood on the other side.

Adjacent to this area, I saw a museum displaying artefacts such as pottery, household items and fragments of human bones remnants of lives once fully lived.

In the lawn stood the famous bronze figure known as the Dancing Girl. Not far away, the bearded limestone bust often referred to as the Priest-King gazed calmly. A history enthusiast and archaeologist travelling with the group, Dr Altaf Aseem, reflected on the site's legacy.

We should take pride in a civilisation that is over 5,000 years old, he said. The concept of urban life and metropolitan cities originated here. People lived a civilised life even then.

As visitors climbed towards the Upper City, the Great Bath came into view. Its precise brickwork and drainage system challenged assumptions about ancient capability.

Nearby, the stupa rose at the highest point, overlooking the Monks' Cells and what is believed to have been an Assembly Hall. The Lower City revealed multi-storey homes, private wells and covered drainage, showing evidence of remarkable civic planning.

And then, just as the mind began to settle into the rhythm of the place, time intruded. Three hours dissolved quickly. It was time to return.

The return By Sunday afternoon, the group was back at Larkana Station. The earlier excitement softened into quieter conversations. Photographs were shared and discussions turned reflective.

Late at night, the train rolled into Karachi Cantonment Station.

Despite the fatigue, the travellers appeared content.

The journey had not merely been a travel programme but a cultural encounter bridging past and present.

Mohenjo-Daro is not confined to museum glass or textbook pages.

It is a living inheritance. To walk its streets, even briefly, is to realise that history is not behind us but beneath us, waiting for the attention we are willing to give it.

Tourism on hold as ME war casts uncertainty



A TOURIST takes pictures at the virtually deserted Aquarium and Underwater Zoo at the Dubai Mall, which is usually packed with visitors.

Cancelled flights, postponed trips and a great deal of uncertainty: the war in the Middle East is casting a long shadow over the tourism outlook for a region that has become a prizes destination for travellers worldwide.

“My last group of tourists left three days ago, and all the other groups planned for March have been cancelled,” Nazih Rawashdeh, a tour guide near Irbid, in northern Jordan, said. “This is the start of the high season here. It’s catastrophic,” he told media.

“And yet there’s no problem in Jordan. It’s perfectly safe.” Across the world, tour operators are scrambling to find solutions for clients stranded in the region or who had trips planned there.

“The priority is getting those already there back home,” French tour operator Comptoir des Voyages President Alain Capestan said.

He said however that the war was also affecting customers who have travelled to other parts of the world, as the Gulf region is home to several major aviation hubs — Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha.

Like other companies, the German tour operators surveyed by AFP — Alltours, Dertour, Schauinsland-Reisen — announced they would cover the cost of extra nights for clients stranded in the Middle East. They also cancelled trips to the UAE and Oman until at least March 7.

Swiss operator MSC Cruises, which has a ship stranded in Dubai, told media on Thursday 5 March it was sending five charter flights to airlift nearly 1,000 passengers.

The firm said it expected the passengers to be out of the region recently, without specifying the destinations of the

Mayor plans Expo Pavilion Centre at Bagh Ibn-i-Qasim

The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) has announced plans to establish a modern Expo Pavilion Centre at Bagh Ibn-i-Qasim to promote trade, support local industries and create new opportunities for investment in the city.

Karachi Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab shared the proposal during a meeting with members of civil society at the KMC head office on Thursday 5 March. He said Karachi, being the country’s economic hub, needs modern and sustainable facilities to host exhibitions, trade events and international business activities.

According to a statement issued after the meeting, the proposed centre will be developed on the model of the Pakistan Pavilion presented at the World Expo 2020 in Dubai. The facility will provide a platform where Karachi’s industrial and commercial potential can be showcased to both local and international audiences.

Barrister Wahab said the Expo Pavilion Centre will help highlight local products and connect manufacturers, exporters and traders with international buyers.

He added that such initiatives are necessary to boost exports, strengthen trade links and expand investment opportunities.

He said Bagh Ibn-i-Qasim has been identified as the proposed location for the project due to its prime position and easy accessibility. The park also offers sufficient space to host large-scale exhibitions and commercial events,

flights or the nationalities of the holidaymakers.

The British travel industry association ABTA said agencies “would not be sending customers to the region for as long as the British Foreign Office advises against all non-essential travel”.

Customers whose holidays were cancelled in recent days will be able to rebook or receive a refund, it said.

The war is disrupting a sector that had been booming in the region.

Oxford Economics analysts warns that “a decline in tourist flows to the region will deal a more severe economic blow than in the past, as tourism’s share of GDP has grown, as has employment in the sector”.

“We estimate inbound arrivals to the Middle East could decline 11-27pc year-on-year in 2026 due to the conflict, compared to our December forecast that projected 13pc growth,” Global Forecasting Director Helen McDermott said.

making it suitable for an international standard trade and exhibition facility.

During the meeting, the mayor directed Municipal Commissioner Syed Ibrar Jaffar to prepare a comprehensive feasibility report for the project and identify a suitable site within Bagh Ibn-i-Qasim for the construction of the pavilion. He also instructed that the project be developed through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model to ensure efficient implementation and long-term sustainability.

Barrister Wahab said the idea is to establish a permanent ‘Pakistan Pavilion-style facility’ that can host trade fairs, industrial exhibitions and investment forums throughout the year. Such a centre, he said, would serve as a one-window platform for businesses and investors to explore commercial opportunities in Karachi.

Reaffirming his commitment to the city’s development, the mayor said Karachi has historically been the backbone of the national economy and has the potential to once again emerge as a global business hub.

He added that ongoing development initiatives in the city reflect the vision of Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, who has consistently emphasised sustainable urban development and economic revival.

The meeting was attended by Shahid Abdullah, Municipal Commissioner Syed Ibrar Jaffar, Financial Advisor Gulzar Abro and representatives of civil society.

8,000-year-old Indus Valley Civilisation may be older than Egypt's earliest Pharaohs

For decades, the dominant explanation for the collapse of the **Bronze Age Harappan civilization** centred on climate change: a weakening of the **monsoon** rains that sustained its great cities. New evidence from an archaeological site in northwest India now suggests that narrative is wrong.

Researchers who analysed **oxygen isotopes** in animal teeth and bones recovered from a single excavation trench at **Bhirrana**, in the state of Haryana, have constructed a continuous 5,000-year record of monsoon variability at the settlement itself. Their findings, published in *Scientific Reports*, show that while the monsoon did weaken after about 7,000 years ago, the civilisation did not collapse as a direct result. Instead, its inhabitants adapted, shifting their **agricultural practices** in ways that gradually transformed their society.

The study resolves a long-standing problem in archaeology: previous climate reconstructions relied on evidence from locations far from Harappan settlements, such as lake sediments in the Thar desert or foraminifera in Arabian Sea cores. Those records could not establish whether climate change and cultural decline were synchronous at the sites where people actually lived. The Bhirrana trench, preserving all cultural levels of the civilisation, provides the first direct comparison.

Bhirrana itself turns out to be significantly older than previously understood. The earliest occupation level, characterised by **Hakra ware** ceramics, has provided mean radiocarbon dates of approximately 8,350 years before present. Optically stimulated luminescence dating of pottery from the trench, conducted for the study, confirms that the settlement was occupied continuously from before 8,000 years ago through to about 2,800 years ago. That makes Bhirrana one of the oldest known Harappan sites in the Indian subcontinent, its origins predating the era of Egypt's first pharaohs by several millennia.

Why This Ancient Civilisation Vanished

The oxygen isotope record from animal teeth and bones functions as a proxy for the composition of meteoric water the animals drank, which in turn reflects monsoon intensity. The Bhirrana data show that the pre-Harappan inhabitants settled the area when the **Ghaggar-Hakra river** system, now



largely dry, was fed by an intensified monsoon between about 9,000 and 7,000 years ago. After 7,000 years ago, the monsoon entered a long, monotonic decline.

Archaeological site of Harappa in modern-day Pakistan, one of the best-known cities of the Indus Valley Civilization. Credit: Muhammad Bin Naveed (CC BY-SA)

Yet the settlements did not disappear. The site shows continuous occupation through the **Early Harappan** phase (approximately 8,000 to 6,500 years ago), the **Early Mature Harappan** (6,500 to 5,000 years ago), and the **Mature Harappan** (5,000 to 2,800 years ago). The urban phase of the civilisation, with its planned cities, standardised weights, and extensive trade networks, flourished during a period of weakening monsoon.

“If climate change was the primary cause of collapse, you would expect to see a relatively abrupt cultural shift coinciding with a major isotopic shift,” the researchers state in their paper. “The data do not show that.”

Climate simulations reveal that repeated century-long droughts reshaped where Indus Valley people lived and strained their water systems. These sustained pressures likely drove the civilization's gradual decline rather than a sudden collapse.

Instead, the archaeological evidence from Bhirrana and other sites points to a different mechanism. During the **late Harappan** phase, settlements shifted from water-intensive crops such as wheat and barley to more drought-resistant varieties including millets and rice. That change in **subsistence strategy** reduced the need for large centralised storage facilities and dense urban centres. Populations dispersed into smaller settlements rather than collapsing outright.

A Civilisation Older than Assumed

The *Time of India* reported on the findings recently, noting that the revised chronology places the roots of the

civilisation well before the emergence of Egypt's first pharaohs. The newspaper's coverage, published February 25 2026, draws on the same *Scientific Reports* study and on carbon dating of pottery fragments and animal bones from deep settlement layers at Bhirrana.

At its peak, the **Indus civilisation** may have supported more than five million people across a territory stretching from the Arabian Sea toward the Ganges basin. Its cities featured grid-pattern streets, covered drainage systems, and wells serving individual homes. Its craftspeople produced drilled gemstone beads, standardized stone weights, copper and bronze tools, and intricately carved seals bearing a script that remains undeciphered. The absence of large temples or conspicuous royal palaces suggests a form of political organisation different from that of contemporary Egypt or Mesopotamia.

The new climate data help explain how such a civilisation could persist through environmental change. The monsoon decline after 7,000 years ago was not a sudden drought event but a gradual process spanning millennia. That gave human populations time to adapt, which they did by modifying their agricultural base. The late Harappan dispersal into smaller settlements represents not a failure of adaptation but a successful response to changing conditions.

The research team analysed faunal remains from the Bhirrana trench identified to species level, including domestic cattle, buffalo, goat and sheep from the earliest levels, as well as wild fauna such as nilgai, spotted deer and antelope that supplemented the diet. The oxygen isotope measurements were performed on bulk tooth and bone phosphates from mandibular and maxillary molar teeth of cattle, goat, deer and antelope, and from rib and vertebra bones, after electron microprobe investigation confirmed preservation of original bioapatite suitable for isotopic analysis.

The pottery fragments dated by optically stimulated luminescence—one from the mature Harappan level at 42 centimetres depth, yielding an age of 4,800 years, and one from the early mature Harappan level at 143 centimetres depth, yielding an age of 5,900 years—confirm the stratigraphic integrity of the trench and the antiquity of the occupation sequence.

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Cycling rally, hike promote health, environmental awareness in Islamabad



People participate in a bicycle rally in Islamabad

Nearly 300 cyclists from all walks of life participated in a cycling championship in Islamabad on Sunday 15 Feb., demonstrating enthusiasm for healthy and environmentally friendly activities.

Meanwhile, hundreds of healthcare professionals joined a hike at Margalla Trail 3 to raise awareness about obesity.

The Islamabad Cycling Championship featured inclusive race categories for Open Men, Open Women, Senior Men, Senior Women, Under-16 and Under-9 participants.

The event was organised by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) in collaboration with Allied Bank Limited.

According to MCI, the event was attended by senior officials and dignitaries, including the district magistrate of Islamabad, the member finance of CDA, the deputy superintendent of police (DSP) of traffic police, the president of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce, students and members of the national women's cricket team, many of whom also joined the cycling activity.

Cash prizes were awarded to the top three champions in each category to recognise their performance and encourage greater participation in cycling and fitness activities.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Officer MCI Dr Anam Fatima said,

'Public spaces are meant to bring people together, and initiatives like this reflect our vision of an Islamabad that is active, inclusive, and environmentally responsible.' She added that the championship underscores CDA and MCI's commitment to promoting urban green mobility, encouraging healthy lifestyles and raising awareness about environmental sustainability as part of the broader vision of a clean and green Islamabad.

Dr Fatima further stated that MCI and CDA will continue to organise such activities to promote healthy lifestyles and public participation, emphasising that providing healthy recreational opportunities to the citizens of Islamabad is among their top priorities.

On the same day, hundreds of healthcare professionals participated in a hike against obesity at Margalla Trail 3. The event was organised by the Islamabad Medical and Dental College in collaboration with Dr Akbar Niazi Teaching Hospital.

Over 700 participants, including students of medicine, dentistry, physical therapy, medical lab technology and nursing, along with faculty members, practising physicians and surgeons, and healthcare management personnel, marched up the scenic trail. Senior leadership remained present throughout, appreciating and encouraging the hikers for their efforts to preserve the beauty of the hills by keeping the route litter-free.

Addressing the gathering, Yasir Khan

Niazi described the initiative as more than a recreational outing, noting that such programs form a cornerstone of the college's vision to cultivate not only academically strong graduates but well-rounded professionals grounded in lifelong learning, ethical practices, community engagement and healthy lifestyles. Staff Reporter.

Hamid tops desert jeep rally, Salma top position among female

In a major upset, Khalid Hamid has emerged as 'sultan' (champion) of the five-day 21st Cholistan International Desert Jeep Rally, while Salma Marwat Khan retained her top position among the female racers, on the concluding day of the mega sports event held near the historic Derawar Fort, about 70kms from here on Sunday 15 Feb.

According to unofficial results, Khalid Hamid covered total distance of 452kms in two rounds of the prepared category in total three hours and fifty-three minutes - a new record since the jeep rally was introduction on a small scale in the vast desert of Cholistan back in 2005.

Hamid was neither prominent in the qualifying round of the drivers, nor he captured any position in the first round of the prepared category on Friday 13 Feb.

According to unofficial results, Hamid was followed by Hussain Asef and Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed, who clinched the second and third positions by covering the distance in three hours and fifty-four minutes and four hours and fourteen minutes, respectively.

However, in the women's category, Ms Salma Marwat Khan was the topper, retaining her last year's title.

The event also featured dirt bike and truck races in the desert.

As part of the event, the divisional administration organised a cultural night and a spectacular fireworks display at Dilwash Stadium on Saturday 14 Feb. night, attended by thousands of spectators, who were entertained by the performance of popular singers, including Sahir Ali Bagga, Gulabo and Seraiki singers for hours. Commissioner Musarrat Jabeen was the chief guest.



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Roosevelt Hotel deal signed with United States



GSA Administrator Edward C. Forst and Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb shake hands after signing an MoU.

Pakistan and the United States on Thursday 19 Feb. signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to launch a structured framework for cooperation on the future of the Roosevelt Hotel in New York, marking a key development in Islamabad's efforts to secure maximum value for the landmark property under its privatisation strategy.

The agreement was finalised in Washington and executed by US General Services Administration (GSA) Administrator Edward C. Forst and Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff witnessed the signing.

According to a statement issued by the Pakistan Embassy, the initiative provides for joint evaluation of the “technical, commercial, and economic parameters” of the project and sets out a time-bound mechanism for moving forward.

The statement described the move as part of a broader effort to deepen economic engagement between the two countries and to introduce an institutional framework for handling what it called a complex, high-value transaction.

“It establishes a structured, time-bound framework for joint evaluation of the technical, commercial, and economic parameters of cooperation, reflecting a shared commitment to transparent, disciplined, and mutually beneficial

progress,” the press release said.

Officials noted that the Roosevelt Hotel — owned by Pakistan International Airlines' investment arm — sits on a prime Manhattan site, where zoning rules and municipal procedures make large-scale redevelopment particularly complicated.

“Given the Roosevelt Hotel's prime Manhattan location and the complexity of New York zoning and municipal processes, institutional coordination aims to reduce execution risk, enhance regulatory clarity, and maximise transaction value,” the statement added.

The government has been exploring options for the property for several years as part of a wider plan to divest loss-making state assets and generate fiscal space. The latest arrangement signals a shift towards a more structured, government-to-government facilitative role in navigating regulatory and commercial hurdles in the United States.

While the MoU does not constitute a final transaction, officials said it creates a formal mechanism for due diligence, feasibility assessments and coordination with relevant regulatory bodies in New York.



A view of KMC building

KMC plans museum at historic site of Chaukhandi

The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) has announced plans to develop a museum and upgrade facilities at the historic Chaukhandi tombs in Karachi, aiming to turn the site into a local and international tourist spot.

The announcement came when Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab visited the centuries-old site and directed officials to prepare a detailed feasibility plan for establishing an international-standard museum.

The mayor also issued directives for the construction of protective boundary walls and the development of open public spaces for visitors.

Chaukhandi tombs, a KMC statement said, date back to the 16th century and are known for their beautifully carved sandstone structures.

The mayor directed the concerned officials to prepare a comprehensive feasibility plan for the establishment of an international-standard museum, the construction of protective boundary walls, and the development of open public spaces to facilitate both local and international visitors.

The initiative aims to transform the historic site into a globally recognised heritage destination, welcoming tourists, researchers and history enthusiasts from around the world.

The mayor emphasised that Karachi is home to numerous historical landmarks that have been neglected in the past.

“We want to revive the true historical face of Karachi and showcase our heritage on an international platform. To achieve this, we must improve infrastructure, ensure accessibility, and create an environment where citizens and tourists can learn about and appreciate our rich past,” he said.

He further directed KMC officials to complete all necessary assessments and planning at the earliest and ensure execution of the project within the current year, reaffirming the administration's commitment to visible and meaningful change in the city.

The proposed development will include improved access routes, visitor facilities, landscaping, and preservation measures to safeguard the centuries-old art and architecture of the tombs while enhancing the overall visitor experience.

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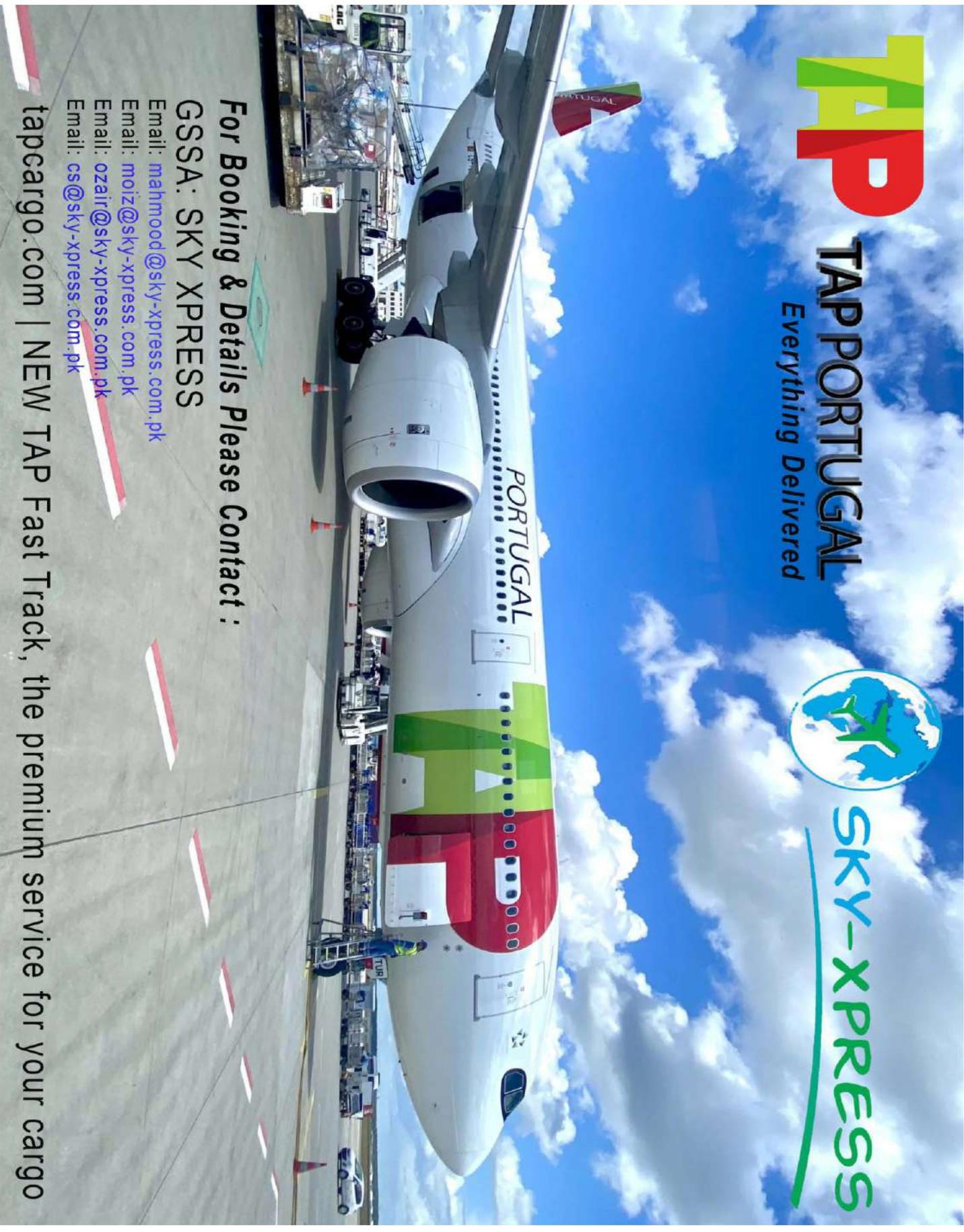
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