

## EU lifts ban on PIA

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Islamabad: The European Union's aviation authorities have lifted a four-year ban on Pakistan's beleaguered national airline that was at the centre of a pilot license scandal, officials said Friday (Nov 29).

Pakistan International Airlines was barred from flying to the EU in June 2020, a month after one of its aircraft plunged into a Karachi street, killing nearly 100 people.

The disaster was attributed to human error by the pilots and air traffic control, and was followed by allegations that nearly a third of the licences for its pilots were fake or dubious.

It remains banned from operating in the United States.

"EASA has lifted the suspension of the third country operator authorisation issued to Pakistan International Airlines," the European Union Aviation Safety Agency said in a statement.

"This marks the end of a long process initiated in 2020, based on factual and verifiable evidence that the ability of the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) to certify and oversee its air operators had degraded below acceptable level."

It added that the EASA "has now re-established sufficient confidence in the PCAA oversight capabilities".

Pakistan's government has said it is committed to privatising the debt-ridden airline and has been scrambling to find a buyer.

Last month, a deal fell through after a potential buyer reportedly offered a fraction of the asking price.

In 2023 PIA made losses of \$270 million according to local media. Its liabilities were nearly \$3 billion, about five times the total worth of its assets.

Last year, dozens of flights were cancelled when it could not afford fuel for its planes.

Nadir Shafi Dar, the head of the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority, confirmed the ban had been lifted.

A PIA spokesperson meanwhile said the airline would "strictly adhere to EASA's regulations and guidelines".

"This milestone has been achieved after four years of relentless efforts by the PIA management," the spokesperson added.

PIA came into being in 1955 when the government nationalised a loss-making commercial airline, and enjoyed rapid growth until the 1990s.

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