

Flynas resumes transporting Iranian Hajj Pilgrims after a decade

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 19 May, 2025



Saudi Arabia's low-cost airline Flynas has resumed transporting Iranian Hajj pilgrims for the first time in over a decade, marking a significant step in the thawing of relations between Riyadh and Tehran.

According to a Saudi civil aviation official, Flynas began flights last Saturday from Tehran's Imam Khomeini Airport and plans to operate from Mashhad as well. Over 35,000 Iranian pilgrims are expected to travel to Saudi Arabia for this year's Hajj, which formally begins in early June.

These flights are not commercial but solely intended for Hajj purposes, the official emphasized.

Iran-Saudi ties were severed in 2016 following the execution of Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr in Saudi Arabia, which sparked protests and attacks

on Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran. That year, Iranian pilgrims were barred from attending Hajj due to security concerns.

Though Iran later resumed sending pilgrims via chartered Iranian flights, full cooperation was restored only after a China-brokered rapprochement in March 2023. Diplomatic relations have since warmed, with ambassadorial appointments, ministerial visits, and renewed air links, including direct Iran Air flights to Dammam and Mashhad.

Notably, in November 2023, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi visited Saudi Arabia for an Arab-Islamic summit on Gaza—the first such visit by an Iranian leader in 20 years. Last month, Saudi Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman visited Tehran and met with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

These developments come as the U.S. and Iran hold multiple rounds of talks on reviving a nuclear agreement. During a recent Gulf visit, former U.S. President Donald Trump hinted that a deal may be near but warned of consequences if Iran fails to act swiftly.

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