

## Pakistan airlines to restart UK flights after five years

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 25 September, 2025



Dhaka: Pakistan's national carrier Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and private airline Airblue will resume direct flights to the United Kingdom after receiving international safety and security clearances, marking their return to one of Pakistan's most important air travel markets for the first time in five years.

The UK Department for Transport has granted both carriers Third Country Operator (TCO) status, a requirement for non-European airlines operating in Britain. The move follows extensive safety audits and comes after the UK lifted restrictions on Pakistani airlines in July 2025, imposed after the 2020 PIA Airbus A320 crash in Karachi that killed 97 people.

The crash triggered a government inquiry that uncovered pilot licensing irregularities and led to flight bans by both the UK and EU.

PIA will relaunch UK flights in October, starting with Manchester, followed by Birmingham and London, according to airline spokesperson Abdullah Khan.

Airblue is also preparing to begin UK operations, with further route details expected soon. These will be the first Pakistani-operated direct flights to the UK since 2020. Currently, British Airways runs just two weekly flights to Islamabad.

In a separate development, the UK has designated PIA as ACC3-certified, allowing it to resume cargo operations from Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi through to August 2030.

This certification, required for non-European carriers flying cargo into the UK, was confirmed by British officials on September 23, 2025.

While PIA had restarted Paris flights in early 2025 following the EU's lifting of its suspension in late 2024, those services were recently paused to concentrate resources on the UK relaunch.

The return of services is expected to benefit the over 1.6 million people of Pakistani origin in the UK, support growing travel demand, and help revive Pakistan's aviation sector. Officials say it will also strengthen bilateral trade, valued at £4.7 billion (\$5.7 billion) annually.

PIA, which has suffered over \$2.5 billion in losses over the past decade, is being prepared for privatization under a wider \$7 billion IMF reform package.

Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar confirmed plans for three to four weekly flights to Manchester starting in September, calling the airline's revival a "top priority."

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has said restoring UK and EU routes is vital to increasing PIA's value ahead of a majority stake sale.

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