

PIA resumes UK flights

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) resumed direct flights to Britain on Saturday (Oct 25), ending a five-year suspension imposed over aviation safety concerns.

UK lifted restrictions on Pakistani carriers in July after concluding that aviation safety standards were “satisfactory and in line with international norms.”

The UK, EU and U.S. had banned PIA flights in June 2020, a month after an Airbus A320 crash in Karachi killed nearly 100 people.

The accident was blamed on human error.

At a ceremony at Islamabad International Airport, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif hailed the resumption of Islamabad-Manchester flights as a “major milestone” in restoring PIA’s credibility.

He said Pakistan had overhauled pilot training, licensing, aircraft maintenance and safety protocols to meet international standards.

Asif said the restoration of flights was part of government efforts to revive national institutions, improve public facilities and promote Pakistan's image abroad, blaming the previous government for damaging the airline's reputation.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif congratulated the nation and Pakistanis in the UK, saying the resumption would strengthen bilateral ties and marked progress in reforming national institutions.

British High Commissioner Jane Marriott expressed "genuine joy" at seeing the first Pakistani carrier depart for the UK in five years, adding, "Here's to more destinations and connections!"

PIA will initially operate twice-weekly flights between Islamabad and Manchester, with plans to expand to London and Birmingham.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency lifted its ban in November 2024, allowing PIA to resume Paris flights in January.

Founded in 1955, the debt-ridden flag carrier employs about 7,000 people and has struggled for decades with mismanagement and regulatory lapses.

The government has pledged to privatise PIA, though a previous sale attempt collapsed last year over pricing.

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