

## PIA to fly to Europe again

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Islamabad: Pakistan's national airline (PIA), will resume flights to Europe on January 10 after the European Union lifted a four-year ban on the carrier.

The airline announced in a statement that a PIA flight will depart from Islamabad to Paris on January 10.

"Initially, two flights will operate weekly (on Friday and Sunday), with plans to gradually increase the frequency," the statement said.

PIA had been banned from flying to the EU in June 2020, following a tragic crash in Karachi, which killed nearly 100 people. The ban came shortly after the incident, which was linked to a scandal involving pilot licenses.

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.

The airline remains banned from operating in the United States.

After Europe's ban was lifted last week, a spokesman for the carrier said they would "strictly adhere to EASA's regulations and guidelines", referring to the European Union's aviation authority.

PIA, which employs 7,000 people, has long been accused of being bloated and poorly run -- hobbled by unpaid bills, a poor safety record and regulatory issues.

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.

The sale was also part of IMF demands in exchange for aid programmes, including the privatisation of public companies, establishing a broader tax base and ending subsidies for the 40 percent of Pakistanis who live below the poverty line.

In 2023, PIA had 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.

While speaking to reporters last week, Pakistan's aviation minister Khawaja Asif called the restoration of flights to Europe a "major value addition" that will make the airline more attractive to potential buyers.

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