

UK lifts five-year ban on Pakistani airlines

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Dhaka: Britain has lifted the five-year ban on Pakistani airlines, allowing them to apply for the resumption of flights to and from the United Kingdom, following aviation safety improvements in Pakistan, said the British High Commission in Islamabad on July 23.

“Based on this independent and technically-driven process, it [UK Air Safety Committee] has decided to remove Pakistan and its air carriers from the [UK Air Safety] List,” the High Commission said.

The move comes after the European Union Aviation Safety Agency lifted a four-year ban on PIA, and the Pakistani state-owned carrier resumed flights to Europe in January.

PIA was barred from flying to the UK in June 2020, a month after one of its aircraft plunged into a Karachi street, killing 97 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 licenses for its pilots were fake or dubious. Pakistan launched an investigation to examine these claims.

While several private Pakistani airlines operate domestically and on regional routes, primarily to the Middle East, PIA has historically been the only carrier to operate long-haul flights to Britain and the EU.

PIA had previously estimated an annual revenue loss of about USD 144 million due to the ban. The airline has long considered UK routes, including London, Manchester, and Birmingham, among its most profitable and holds sought-after landing slots at London's Heathrow Airport that could become active again.

Pakistan's government has said it is committed to privatizing the debt-ridden airline. It is hoping that recent reforms that led to the airline's first operating profit in 21 years, will help attract buyers under a broader International Monetary Fund-backed privatization push.

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