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Rochdale Grooming Gang Leaders Face Deportation as Pakistan Flight Ban Lifted

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Two of the central figures behind the Rochdale grooming scandal could finally be deported to Pakistan, after the United Kingdom lifted its flight restrictions on Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). Qari Abdul Rauf and Adil Khan, both convicted over a decade ago for preying on vulnerable girls, have remained in the country despite losing their British citizenship.

The duo, once dual U.K.-Pakistani nationals, avoided deportation by renouncing their Pakistani citizenship shortly before a legal hearing. This move effectively made them

stateless, tying the hands of the Home Office. Under international law, the U.K. cannot deport individuals not recognised by another country.

However, officials in Islamabad have now indicated they may accept the pair back once direct flights between the two countries resume. The change follows the U.K. government's decision to lift a flight ban imposed in 2020, after a tragic air crash in Karachi killed 97 people. PIA had since been blocked from operating in British and European airspace.

Diplomatic Breakthrough

Last month, the British High Commission confirmed that the U.K.'s Air Safety Committee had cleared Pakistani carriers to operate direct routes into the U.K. again. While flights are not expected to restart immediately, Pakistani airlines can now begin applying for operating permits through the U.K. Civil Aviation Authority.

A spokesperson for the commission praised the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority's efforts in meeting international safety standards, calling it a "technically driven and sustained process". U.K. High Commissioner Jane Marriott added that she looked forward to using a Pakistani carrier to visit family once services are up and running.

The move also opens the door for more productive talks between London and Islamabad on deportation matters. Foreign Secretary David Lammy is said to be leading discussions with Pakistani authorities, Home Office officials, and Faith Minister Lord Khan, who is believed to be supporting.

Rauf, 55, and Khan, 54, were jailed in 2012 after being found guilty of grooming and sexually abusing underage girls. Rauf was known to transport victims from Rochdale to parties in other northern cities, including Bradford and Leeds. The scale of abuse shocked the nation and sparked calls for tougher immigration controls and swifter deportation procedures for foreign-born criminals.

The delay in deporting the pair has caused public outrage, particularly in Rochdale. Earlier this year, MailOnline reported that Rauf had returned to work as a delivery driver in the very town where he committed his crimes. Neighbours expressed disbelief, with one mother saying, "Nobody can believe that monster is still here. It's disgusting. What is the country coming to?"

Local MP Paul Waugh welcomed the lifting of the ban, while making clear that the move was based solely on aviation safety. He added, “It shows the sort of cooperation we need between the U.K. and Pakistan to ensure convicted offenders like those in the Rochdale grooming gang are finally removed.”

For many, this potential deportation is long overdue. Victims and their families have waited years to see action, and the resumption of direct flights could mark a significant step toward delivering long-promised justice.