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## UK Removes Pakistan from Air Safety List, Allows Airline Operations

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The United Kingdom has lifted its ban on Pakistani airlines, removing Pakistan from the Air Safety List on July 16, 2025, following significant safety improvements. This article explores the decision's impact on Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and Airblue, the economic benefits for bilateral ties, and the challenges ahead, while questioning the timing of the reforms.

The UK's Air Safety Committee, after rigorous reviews, ended the five-year ban prompted by a 2020 Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) crash in Karachi, which killed 97 people, and subsequent claims by then-aviation minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan that nearly a third of Pakistan's pilots held dubious licenses. "Extensive engagement" with the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) ensured compliance with international standards, said British High Commissioner Jane Marriott, who expressed eagerness to use Pakistani carriers once logistics are finalized, per DAWN. Individual airlines, including PIA and Airblue, must still secure permits from the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

This decision, following the European Union's lifting of its ban in January 2025, is a lifeline for PIA, which reported its first operating profit in 21 years. The move could boost Pakistan's £4.7 billion trade with the UK, its third-largest partner, and ease travel for 1.6 million UK-based Pakistanis. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called it a "new opportunity" for families and trade, per X. However, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif criticized the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government's "baseless" pilot claims, which he said caused massive financial losses for PIA, labeling it a "crime against the state."

Skeptics question why reforms took five years, leaving PIA crippled while Pakistan's diaspora relied on costly indirect flights. Posts on X, like @Razarumi's, highlight the "mega inconvenience" caused by PTI's mishandling. With PIA's privatization looming under International Monetary Fund (IMF) pressure, the timing raises concerns about political motives over genuine reform. Pakistan must ensure sustained safety standards and efficient permit processes to capitalize on this

opportunity, lest bureaucratic delays undermine the restored trust in its aviation sector.