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Pakistan Halts Road Travel for Arbaeen Pilgrimage to Iran and Iraq Over Security Concerns

July 28, 2025

– Categories: Politics & Government



On July 27, 2025, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi announced that Pakistan has banned road travel for pilgrims (Zaireen) heading to Iran and Iraq for the Arbaeen pilgrimage, citing heightened security threats along the land routes, particularly through Balochistan. The decision was made following consultations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Balochistan government, and national security agencies. Authorities emphasized that the move, while difficult, is necessary to ensure public safety and national security. Air travel remains permitted, and steps are being taken to accommodate the large number of pilgrims through increased flight operations.

The Arbaeen pilgrimage, which marks the 40th day of mourning for Imam Hussain's martyrdom, draws an estimated 700,000 Pakistani pilgrims annually. To minimize disruption, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has scheduled special flights to Najaf, with departures planned from August 8 to 11 and return flights from August 18 to 23. Fares have been fixed at \$675 per passenger. Although this arrangement ensures continuity of religious travel, concerns have been raised by some pilgrims regarding the affordability of air travel.

In parallel with these travel adjustments, the government has introduced structural reforms in the management of pilgrim movement. Starting January 1, 2026, only registered Zaireen Group Organisers will be allowed to arrange pilgrimage trips. This new system will replace the traditional Salar-led groups. Organisers will be responsible for ensuring the safe return of their groups, with penalties in place for violations, including cancellation of registration for non-compliance.

This decision reflects Pakistan's broader security strategy amid rising threats in Balochistan and other regions. The government's efforts to ensure the safety of pilgrims also align with earlier agreements to improve cross-border coordination with Iran and Iraq. However, the new restrictions override prior arrangements that had aimed to keep border access open during the months of Muharram and Safar.

While the decision may inconvenience many, officials have reiterated that it prioritizes the safety of citizens while maintaining respect for religious obligations. Moving forward, successful implementation will depend on effective coordination between authorities, service providers, and the religious community to ensure both security and accessibility for all pilgrims.