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Quetta Flights Approved for Arbaeen Pilgrims

August 6, 2025

– Categories: Politics & Government



Pakistan's government has authorized direct flights from Quetta to Iran and Iraq for Arbaeen pilgrims, addressing security concerns after banning overland travel.

On August 5, 2025, Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif announced in the National Assembly that the federal government has directed the Balochistan government to operate direct flights from Quetta to Iran and Iraq to facilitate Shia pilgrims traveling for Arbaeen, the 40-day commemoration of Imam Hussain's martyrdom. This decision follows a ban on overland travel along the 800-kilometer route from Quetta, imposed due to heightened security risks, particularly the threat of terrorist attacks on pilgrim convoys. Asif emphasized the government's commitment to ensuring safe and timely travel, stating

that one flight has already been approved by Iran, with efforts underway to secure more frequent operations.

The ban, announced on July 27, 2025, by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, sparked protests in Quetta, where hundreds of pilgrims, supported by the Balochistan Shia Conference, blocked roads, citing high airfare costs. Asif addressed these concerns, noting that the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has invited licensed private airlines to operate charter flights, with fares starting at \$675 through Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). The government has also arranged onward transportation from airports in Iran and Iraq to pilgrimage sites, such as Karbala, where millions gather annually. Asif highlighted discussions during the Iranian president's recent visit to Pakistan, which secured an additional flight to ease pilgrim movement.

The decision reflects ongoing security challenges in Balochistan, where sectarian violence and militant attacks have targeted pilgrims. Naqvi, after consultations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and security agencies, underscored the necessity of the road ban to protect lives, a stance backed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's directive to maximize flight availability. The government has faced criticism from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP), who argue the ban disrupts traditional pilgrimage routes. Asif assured lawmakers that the measures prioritize safety while respecting religious obligations, urging airlines to leverage the approved routes. With Arbaeen approaching on August 14, the government aims to streamline air travel to ensure pilgrims reach Karbala securely.