

# Pakistan International Airlines: The four “missing” employees released after been detained for six days

Tuesday 9 February 2016, by [HUSSAIN Arshad](#) (Date first published: 9 February 2016).

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## Some carrots after the stick and PIA strikers are ready to talk

### ***PIA partially restores international and domestic flights as four ‘missing’ protestors appear in different parts of Karachi***

Protest leaders say they are willing to talk with govt if Shehbaz Sharif and Chaudhry Nisar are included in govt side

Flight operations largely restored in Lahore and Karachi

Four members of the Joint Action Committee (JAC) of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) employees, who were allegedly kidnapped by unidentified people last week (Wednesday), were released in various parts of the city early Monday morning, as the airline partially resumed flights, mostly to the Arab countries.

After the missing employees’ return, JAC Chief Capt Sohail Baloch said that the protesting workers were ready for talks with prime minister’s trusted aides

“We recommend to prime minister to designate Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif and Interior Minister Chaudhary Nisar Ali Khan for talks. We are ready to hold negotiations with them,” he told a press conference.

He said that the JAC had ended the condition of direct talks with the prime minister. He requested the pilots to bring back stranded pilgrims from Jeddah and fly other pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

Baloch underlined that workers never backtracked from negotiations.

The flexibility from the JAC was shown after the missing employees returned to their homes on Monday morning.

JAC leader and People’s Unity (PU) President Hidayatullah Khan, PU Vice President Zameer Chandio, Saifullah and Mansoor Dhalwan had been found missing on Wednesday night after the PIA employees started demonstrating against the proposed privatisation of the national flag carrier.

JAC leader Baloch had warned the government on Sunday that the employees would take a protest rally from the PIA head office at the Old Terminal to the Jinnah Terminal if their missing colleagues were not recovered. After the employees returned to their homes, the JAC chief said that the employees were willing to negotiate with the government side but it was clear that they weren't keen to start negotiating with privatisation czar, Muhammad Zubair.

## **FLIGHT OPERATIONS RESUME**

Meanwhile, the flight operation of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) was fast returning to normalcy with the return of employees from strike.

PIA spokesperson Daniyal Gillani said that 18 flights of the national flag carrier had reached their destinations since the resumption of flight operations.

The first flight carrying above 350 Umrah pilgrims departed from Karachi Airport to Jeddah on Monday evening after flight operations remained suspended since the night of February 2.

The JAC in view of the problems faced by Umrah pilgrims allowed to start flight operations from Karachi only for the pilgrims and those travelling to Arab countries for employment purposes.

PIA officials said that the airline had been operating flights from Islamabad, Gilgit and Lahore.

"Pk7337 departed from Karachi to Jeddah carrying all the Umrah pilgrims stuck at Karachi Airport Hotel," PIA spokesman Daniyal Gillani told a news conference.

Out of 110 flights, only 30 operated from Islamabad and Lahore on Monday as some of the employees returned to work on these airports, the spokesman said.

He said that 16 flights operated from Islamabad and Lahore and one from Karachi in the last 24 hours while the operation in Gilgit had been completely restored. Since late Saturday night, the spokesman said, 9 flights had been operated from Islamabad, five from Lahore, six from Jeddah and one from Karachi.

## **'PROTEST WILL CONTINUE'**

"The march has been put off as our colleagues have returned," JAC Spokesman Nasrullah Khan told reporters later. He, however, added that the employees would continue to protest outside all the major airports until acceptance of their demands.

Speaking to media persons, Hidayatullah said the four men had been detained for six days.

"We didn't know where they were taking us at night," he said, as their eyes had been covered throughout. "They left us in various parts of the city.... We don't know which agency they are from," he said of the people who detained him along with his colleagues.

Earlier, a petition was filed in the Sindh High Court regarding the disappearance of the protesters. No one was named in the petition.

Police is investigating the incident after the JAC officials registered the FIR at the Airport Police Station.

Police have said that former adviser to the prime minister and three other top officials of the airline would be investigated after registering their name in the FIR.

According to police sources, an investigation team is being constituted to take further action. The five PIA and government officials, they said, were accused of plotting to kill the protesters, although not of opening fire themselves.

The top management of the airlines has issued show causes notices to around 60-70 officials of the airline in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. The notices were issued mostly to those who are in charge of operations including the engineering sections.

## **SAFETY AT ISSUE**

After remaining suspended for six days because of the employees' strike, PIA flight operations partially resumed on Sunday when the airline's two Boeing aircraft brought home 725 pilgrims stranded in Saudi Arabia.

Two more planes took off from Benazir Bhutto International Airport Islamabad for Jeddah on Sunday night to bring back the remaining pilgrims. Another flight (PK-211) left for Dubai.

The airline's ATR flight with four people on board landed at the Gilgit airport and returned to Islamabad with the passengers stranded there. One domestic and four international flights were operated from Lahore, but operations from other airports of the country could not resume.

However, PIA employees voiced concerns that proper safety protocol had not been followed to put the planes in the air.

PIA engineers warned the management against operating flights without ensuring the aircraft's maintenance protocols as it may cause serious safety hazards.

The Society of Aircraft Engineers of Pakistan said: "The PIA management is forcing the engineers to release the aircraft without accomplishing the prerequisites that are mandatory as per ICAO and PCAA regulations. The safety of passengers and the aircraft itself is being jeopardised. Inspections and components' replacement issues are being waived off by PCAA Pakistan under pressure by the government officials."

On Sunday night, a warning letter about the application of the Pakistan Essential Services (Maintenance) Act, 1952, was delivered to striking employees to make them aware that their strike was illegal, PIA spokesman Daniyal Gilani said.

ARSHAD HUSSAIN

*Pakistan Today:*

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2016/02/09/national/some-carrots-after-the-stick-and-pia-strikers-a-re-ready-to-talk/>

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## **PIA strikers call off protest, flight operations resume nationwide**

The Joint action Committee (JAC) of the employees of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) late on Tuesday evening announced that they were calling off the strike. They also asked the employees to resume flight operations across the country with immediate effect.

Addressing a press conference, JAC Chairman Sohail Baloch announced the decision to end the strike and requested “all the airline workers to work with full dedication and pay no heed to anyone trying to disrupt the flight operations”.

“A kind friend advised us to call off the strike,” Baloch said when asked if the protesters had been successful in negotiating a deal with the government.

The JAC chairman said he will meet Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif later in the night.

“We hope that the meeting with Punjab chief minister will be satisfactory and beneficial for both for the government and employees of PIA,” he said.

When asked if the JAC has retracted from its demands, Baloch said he will “apprise media about the developments after meeting with the Punjab chief minister”.

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