

# PIA to utilise B-747 for Hajj, Umrah operations

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) will utilise its five B-747 aircraft for its annual Umrah operations from June onwards.

The management is currently in the selection process of flight engineers in order to run the flight operations of the airline through these aircraft, a private TV channel reported.

The airline has limited aircraft and it has to provide services to all its passengers, who rely on it for Umrah and Hajj.

Normally, the PIA charters aircrafts from various airlines for pilgrims during its operations in the Hajj and Umrah season.

The B-747 will first provide services to the Umrah pilgrims initially and then will also be used for the domestic and regional flights.

In March, former MD PIA Kamran Rasool Khan had ordered to ground all eight B-747 aircraft on the back of its high fuel consumption and directed to use the B-777 aircraft for operating the Umrah flights. But most of the engineers of

the PIA termed the decision unwise to exploit Boeing 777 aircrafts for the Umrah operations, claiming that the aircraft could do more profit for long routes rather than for short routes.

The PIA has spent around \$105 million last year to repair its B-747 aircrafts and they would be operational till 2011.

Last year, the PIA had run its chartered aircraft but relied on the B-747 aircrafts and saved Rs20 billion in the national exchequer.

The capacity of multiple B-777 aircrafts is 390. However, the six Boeing 747-367 of the PIA have the capability to carry 433 passengers and two other Boeing 747-240 Combis have the capacity of 264 passengers and 30 tonnes main deck cargo capacity.

Engine experts said the PIA had invested heavily on the repair of the B-747 aircrafts on the sole aim to exploit them in the Hajj and Umrah operations by 2011, so that the management should continue its business plan rather to ground these aircrafts. —APP