

Sialkot operation denied

# Dubai CAA move shocks PIA

By Zulqernain Tahir

LAHORE, Dec 1: The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has decided in principle to take up the "denial of landing rights" at Dubai from Sialkot with the United Arab Emirates through the Pakistan government.

The Dubai Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) had refused to give landing rights to the PIA for its operation from Sialkot. The national flag carrier had planned direct flights from Sialkot to Dubai from Nov 30 this year; it had earlier applied (for landing rights) in October in the light of an agreement between the governments of Pakistan and the UAE.

However, the PIA could not receive any response from the Dubai CAA to its request till the last minute and had to cancel the flights (from Sialkot) and operated via Peshawar on Dec 1.

The bilateral air services agreement between Pakistan and the UAE allows the designated airlines of the former to operate unlimited frequencies from any point in Pakistan to Dubai. Similarly, the designated airlines of the UAE are entitled to operate unlimited frequencies between Dubai and Karachi.

A senior PIA official said: "The Emirates has never been refused permission (by the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority) to increase the number of its flights to Karachi as required under the bilateral air services agreement."

He further informed Dawn that the airlines of the UAE were allowed operation of 11 more frequencies a week to three conditional gateways - Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. "Other six airlines of the UAE have never violated the bilateral air services agreement and have always granted permission for flights to all airlines of Pakistan," he said.

"This is the first case of denying permission to the PIA by the CAA authorities of Dubai, which should not go unnoticed by the authorities concerned." In the past it denied permission to Shaheen Airlines, a private operator.

"If the Dubai CAA will adopt delaying tactics, the issue arising out of agreement violation will slip out of its hands," warned the official.

At present, the Emirates Airlines is operating 28 weekly flights to and from Karachi and 11 flights from other gateways.