

New aviation policy imperative for growth: CAA

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The government must approve a new aviation policy immediately if it wants to increase the number of airlines, which could help the aviation industry to grow, Director General Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Air Commodore (Retd) Junaid Ameen said on Wednesday.

"There remains a doubt in minds of investors," he said while speaking to The News on the sidelines of a conference on civil aviation in Pakistan. "Until the policy is approved, investors will remain confused."

The Aviation Policy 2007, which seeks to liberalise the country's airspace, has been awaiting government's approval for the past two years. Among other things, it allows small aircraft like 48-seater twin-engine airplanes to be used for scheduled charter

service.

Ameen said private investors had expressed interest in starting charter services. "We are in talks with two parties. One wants to operate aircraft from Karachi to Lahore and the other from here to Islamabad."

He said there was a lot of growth potential for airlines as all the existing ones were making good revenues. "Pakistani airlines have 80pc aircraft occupancy ratio and that is very good in present circumstances."

Asked if the CAA would continue to allow access to foreign carriers, he said international airlines willing to increase frequency could not be barred. The regulator had to look after the interest of passengers as well, he said.

"We cannot ban airlines just because the national carrier is not making profit," he said, about the tough time

Gulf carriers were giving to loss-incurring Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). "PIA is not facing difficulties because of competition. There are other issues related to management."

He said competition should not be restricted as open skies had become a norm everywhere in the world.

The conference titled 'Civil aviation — lifeline to national and global economy' heard experts emphasising on the need of exploiting the regional location of Pakistan, which connects different regions.

Adnan Hassan, former World Bank adviser and Chairman Mecasa Advisers, a financial consultancy firm, said efforts must be made to gear up the aviation industry for coming opportunities.

"For next few years, the highest passenger growth will take place in the neighbouring Middle East region," he said.