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PERCEPTION-REALITY-VISION-SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

THE GAMBIT OF THE PRIVATIZATION OF PIA

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RESEARCH BRIEF



Abbreviations:

PIA:	Pakistan International Airlines
QA:	Qatar Airways
TA:	Turkish Airlines
OA:	Orient Airways
PIAC:	Pakistan International Airlines Corporation
PIACB:	Pakistan International Airline Conversion Bill 2015
PCCA:	Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority
ECC:	Economic Coordination Committee
PAC:	Public Accounts Committee
SAD:	Secretary Aviation Division

1.1 Introduction:

Transportation plays a vital role in the development of a country and can be divided into various means such as air, land, and sea routes. Every country uses at least one or all of them according to its geographical location. Owing to the era's technological advancement, if a gadget is introduced in Washington, it will be available in Delhi the very next day. This shows the significance of air transport. Similarly, sea route and land routes have their own importance; one is more vital to the country and another is better for the exportation aspect. If we call air transportation a revolution, it wouldn't be wrong. It has been vital since right after the experiment by Wright Brothers.

At that time, its main purpose was to transport people from one place to another. The first negative use of airplanes was during the First World War in which they were used against enemy forces. Air transportation proved a vital tool in winning the war. With the passage of time, it was adapted to various forms for various different purposes for example choppers in the medical field, war, commercial use and even personal use. The journey which began from a one-man plane into two pilots in case of war gave way to the commercial production of airplanes by American Boeing Company and German Airbus. These two corporations were the world hegemony in producing commercial jets for other countries. Initially, Boeing remained ahead of Airbus but today, Airbus is ahead of Boeing after designing Airbus A330 which is the world's biggest plane with capacity for seven hundred plus passengers. China is not lagging in this field as it previously was; they have launched their first trial model in 2015 which has a capacity of four hundred passengers and are now eliminating the monopoly of two companies over the production of jet planes. It may be called a justified development as the modern world is a world of specialization and even countries specialize in specific areas. Every country cannot specialize in every area of production. Some countries specialize in a technology and others acquire that technology with massive investment and experiments.

Pakistan buys planes from both Boeing and Airbus and not from China as the latter is new in this field. Pakistan's independence enforced some obligations towards the state and air transportation was one of them. Initially, we fulfilled our needs in very poor manner but later on the country learned how to develop and operate better air transportation and so Pakistan International Airlines was initiated under Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority. PIA proved its mettle right after its inception, so much so that even countries like Malaysia and Jordan adopted PIA as a role model. PIA provided them with technical help, that is, with technicians and some planes.

With PIA's former success established, the question of how such a successful corporation is running on loss with a lot of state subsidies arises. It is a national asset to Pakistan and its value can't be denied, however, due to the institution's continuous loss, suggestions have been presented in this paper to improve its quality.

1.2 Historical Background of PIA:

The plan to form an international airline was envisioned before the independence of Pakistan. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, realized the need of an international airline independent of British Airways. The idea was significant as Pakistan comprised of two wings by 1100 miles and a link between the two was vital. The plan was formulated before independence in 1946

by Muhammad Ali Jinnah when he instructed Mirza Ahmed Ispahani to inaugurate a Muslim airline; Orient Airways was initiated on 23rd October 1946 from Calcutta. It was the first Muslim airline during British Raj owned by an individual. Initial capital for Orient Airways (OA) was provided by the Ispahani Group, Admajee and Arag groups. Its first chairman was M.A. Ispahani and the General Manager was Air Vice Marshal O. K. Carter. At the beginning 4 Douglas DC-3 were obtained and the first operation took place on 4th June 1947. Orient Airways transported people from Karachi to Delhi and then from Karachi to Dhaka. Later on, they launched three new routes: Karachi-Lahore-Peshawar, Karachi-Quetta-Lahore and Karachi-Delhi-Kolkata-Dhaka. The year 1949 proved lucky for Orient Airways as they acquired 10 DC Douglas and 3 Convair 240s. In March 1955 Orient Airways was merged into PIAC by the government of Pakistan.

Orient Airways was a privately owned company with limited capital and resources, it was hard to expect its growth and expansion independently. The Government of Pakistan took the initiative to form a state-owned airline and invited OA to merge with it and so in October 1955 the PIAC ordinance was passed. OA was not just an airline, it was a full mechanism to run a successful business as it also owned trained pilots, engineers, technicians which proved to be a great asset for PIA during its teething phase.

After its establishment, PIA took its first flight from London to Cairo and then Rome in 1955. Due to its international service, PIA earned substantial revenue and foreign exchange which helped in buying new aircraft, spare parts, and in expansion of PIA which was a great necessity at that time. PIA also ordered some new planes like two Super Constellations and Five Viscounts which were to be delivered in 1959. Until that time PIA possessed a small fleet which comprised of Convairs, Viscounts, Super Constellations, and DC-3s. The man to be given credit for PIA's planning is Mr. Zafar-ul-Ahsan who was also the first managing director for four years. He made reforms from top to bottom level and was so popular among the employees that on his retirement they presented him a silver replica with a caption "The House You Built". After Zafar-ul-Ahsan, Air Commodore Nur Khan Marshal was appointed as the Managing Director of PIA in 1959. His period is often remembered as the "Golden Years of PIA". During his period, PIA had the honor of launching its first Boeing 707 jet service in March 1960. Not a single South Asian country had used it before then. The inclusion of jet planes set some trends for PIA's future with increasing income and new, very profitable routes such as the London-Karachi-Decca route. With the help of jet planes, PIA began operating longer routes across the Atlantic Ocean from Karachi to New York.

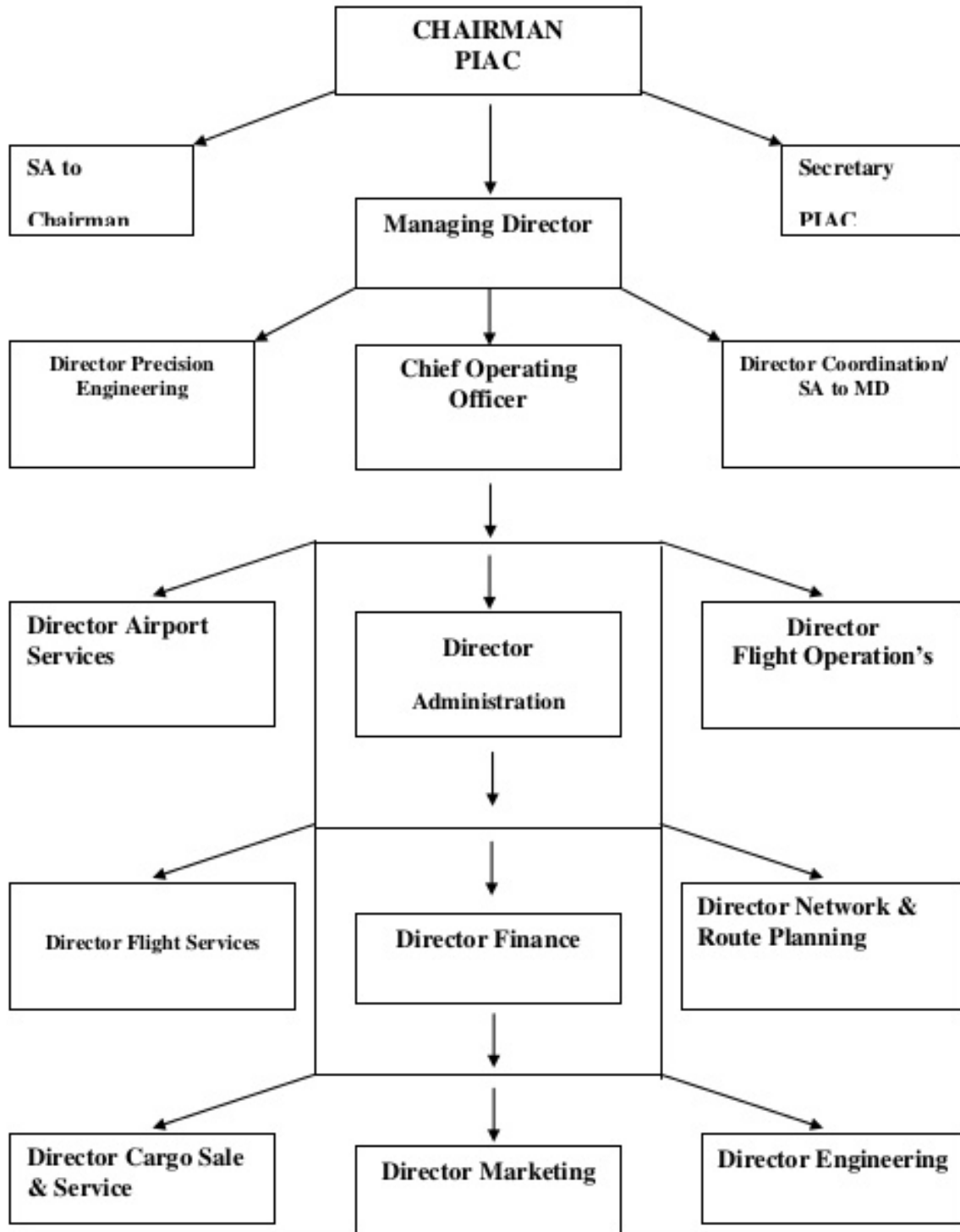
Eventually, PIA ordered some new planes from Boeing Company like Boeing 720Bs and Sikorsky Helicopters. Helicopter services were initiated for East Pakistan and gained popularity in 1962; this service was provided in areas like Ishurdi Upazila (city in Western Bangladesh), Comilla (city in Eastern Bangladesh), Dacca, Chittagong and Sylhet (North-East Bengal). It was very effective as it transported 70,000 passengers in first year but due to two accidents, the service was abolished in 1966. During its initial period in the 1960s, PIA made records which are still unbeatable. It took a flight from London to Karachi in presence of Federation Aeronautics International and reached its destination in 6 hours, 43 minutes and 51 seconds.

During the 1960s, China was somewhat isolated from the rest of the world because of its communist ideology. At that time, the West considered it a threat and took all measures to eradicate it with either coercive or polite manners. In this specific scenario, Pakistan opened its gate for China on 24th April 1964 with Boeing 720B. Flying into a communist state while being non-communist was a distinguishing feature for PIA. PIA's first service to China operated from Karachi to Shanghai via Canton. After Mr. Nur Khan, Asghar Khan, Air Vice Marshal was appointed as the General Manager for three years. During his period, new uniforms for PIA hostesses and pilots were designed by French Designer Pierre Cardin. It was not just a uniform but a new phase in the development of PIA as it instantly captured the market with the new development both at home and abroad.

PIA had the privilege to use a computer before any other institution to enhance their performance; the airline began using IBM 1401 in 1967. It also initiated its first overhauling engine shop in Karachi with a training facility for its employees in Ground Training School also known as PIA Training Centre. These advancements in PIA added revenues and led toward growth in the sixties and in the following decades with new destinations, new equipment, and new enthusiasm. A new shop was also inaugurated and commissioned in 1968 for a new Jet Hangar for Boeing with a supporting airframe. Here the question arises: if an airline was running so successfully with sufficient equipment, machinery and workforce, how then did it come to be running at loss and infested with corruption so much so that it is being considered to be privatised?



ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF PIA

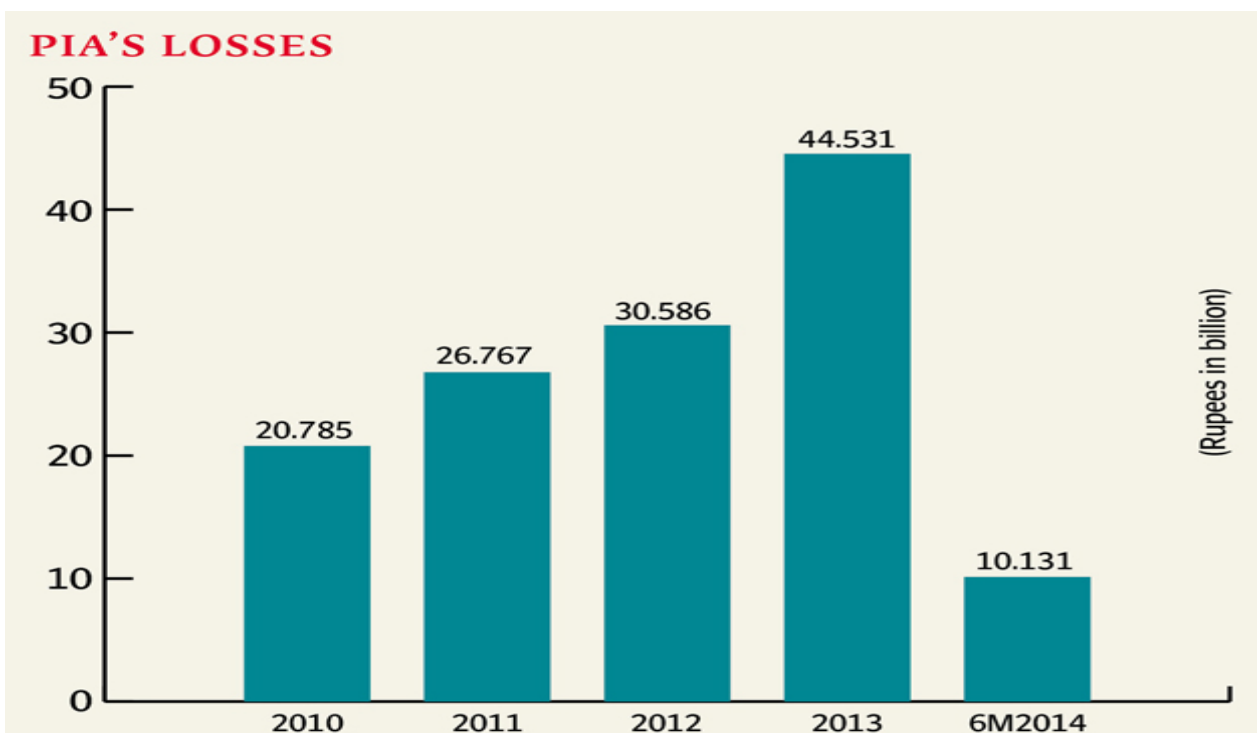


Flight Routes of PIA:



1.3 The Ratio of Losses to PIA:

PIA's performance in terms of profit is getting worse by every passing day which ultimately raises the question of the airline's efficiency. It is true that PIA hired some planes on lease according to its demand and to eliminate the loss ratio. This has not helped the situation and loss is still in billions. During 2010, the total loss was Rs20.785 billion; in 2011, it was Rs26.785 billion; in 2012, it was Rs30.586 billion; in 2013, the ratio of loss shot as high as Rs44.531 billion. The first half of 2014 was much better for PIA in this respect as the loss ratio stooped to Rs10.131 billion. These facts were revealed by the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC). In a report given by Secretary Aviation Division (SAD) to Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the total liabilities of PIA are estimated to be Rs. 288 billion which is payable to different entities by PIA.



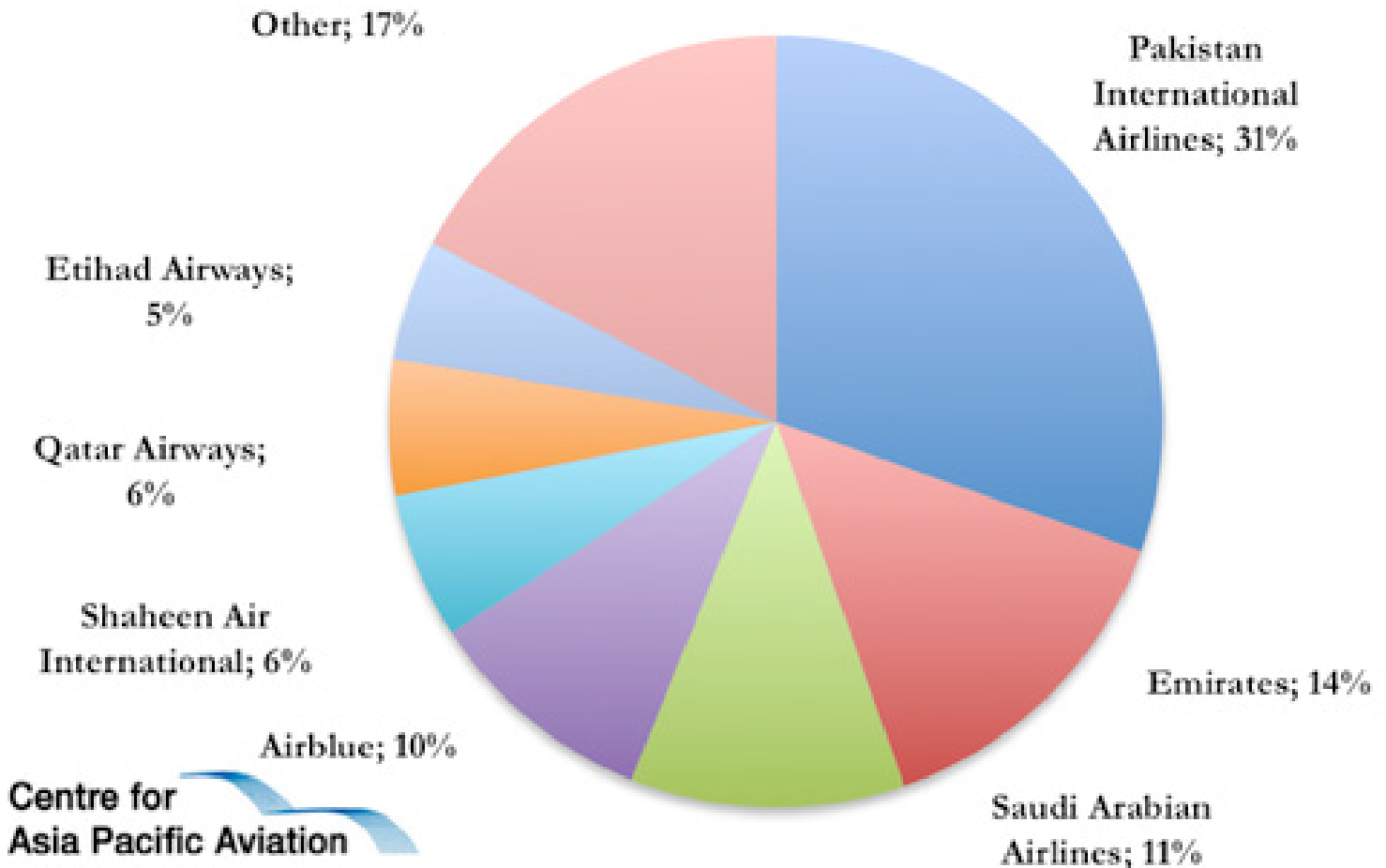
1.4 Corruption Cases in PIA:

PIA has more cases of mismanagement and inefficiency among various segments of the corporation than corruption. However, some officials were caught red-handed last year when there were trying to issue fake boarding cards. Three employees were dismissed and four were suspended from service because of their involvement in human trafficking and negligence.

1.5 Major Causes of Loss to PIA:

Most of the fleets in PIA are too old which has incurred heavy maintenance costs so they have borrowed heavily from local banks on high interest rates. PIA pays Rs3.2 billion annually for its borrowed money with heavy interests which has significantly deteriorated its financial structure. The employee structure of PIA is also not too good; it is common fact that there are more workers in PIA than its original capacity, ultimately a financial loss. According to some global figures, core workers and noncore workers for a fleet should be 150-200 persons but in case of PIA there are more than 650 workers per fleet. The number of total PIA fleets is 26 with 18,331 total employees; among them 7000 are noncore employees who incur a total cost of about 5.5 billion annually. This then is one problem which comes with its solution. By eliminating excessive workers, the cost of salaries can be controlled but this is until now only hypothetical.

Apart from this, there are some world destinations which also cause loss to PIA. Across the world, PIA has a total of 25 destinations. The major landing zones among them are the Middle East, United Kingdom, and Malaysia. These are profitable destinations. Saudi Arabia too is a profitable destination as PIA earned Rs. 6 billion only in Hajj season in 2014 which is about 55% of its total revenue. However, there are some other destinations like China, Japan, and New York which are not so profitable and sustain a loss to PIA. Back in 2014, the then aviation secretary Muhammad Ali Gardezi simplified that if PIA starts to earn Rs12 billion annually, it will be able to pay all its debts in 24 years. Some other reasons of loss which cannot be denied are poor management, political interference, hiring unqualified and unskilled workers due to political affiliations, and failure to plan contingencies. Some foreign airlines (Qatar Airways, Etihad, and Emirates etc.) have also entered Pakistan which has created competition. When facing competition, one must enhance quality and efficiency but in case of PIA, that did not happen. Consequently, it ran into loss.



1.6 Privatization and its Implementation:

Privatization is not a new phenomenon for our country. Previously, shares of Pakistan Telecommunication Authority were partially sold to public and other private owned entities. History holds precious lessons as in the process of nationalization of various private entities back in the 1970s the Pakistani economy faced huge economic losses both in short and long term.

The current government is taking a very bold step of partially privatizing PIA by holding 51 % shares along with retaining its management. It will prove helpful to lower the burden on public treasury. Some examples of successful privatization from developed countries and their performance after privatization are mentioned here.

Privatization in the US started back in the 1990s when the government privatized some institutions like electrical utilities, prisons, railroads and some educational departments. Some major facilities in the US like highways, dams, and research work are also given under private ownership. Reagan administration was a central propagator of privatization during the 1980s to reduce government size and budget balance. Britain is not behind in the list as during Margaret Thatcher's era, twelve regional electricity companies were sold to private owners for over \$10 billion. British Airways and British Telecom were also sold for \$20 billion.

New Zealand also sold seven state-owned companies including telecommunication and printing offices and consequently earned \$3 billion. Argentina sold telephone companies, the national airline, and a petrochemical company for more than \$2.1 billion. Mexico also privatized some companies for \$2.4 billion. Some other countries in Eastern Europe such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland have made efforts towards privatization. These countries are privatizing their own corporations despite they being crucial for running the economy. Privatization for them has been a success and has generated a lot of profit with reasonable taxes to the government. In the same way, PIA may be privatized if it is thought a crucial step but even then it should be privatized partially.

1.7 Case Study of Qatar Airways

Qatar Airways is the national airline of Qatar. Initially, it started operation in 1994 when it was much smaller than it is now and was operating on a small number of routes. It was not very efficient and to enhance its performance, it was re-launched in 1997 under the command of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. He was a visionary leader and had the vision to turn Qatar Airways into a leading international airline with high standards of serving and excellence. Because of his vision, QA is still progressing and is known as one of the fastest growing carriers in the world.

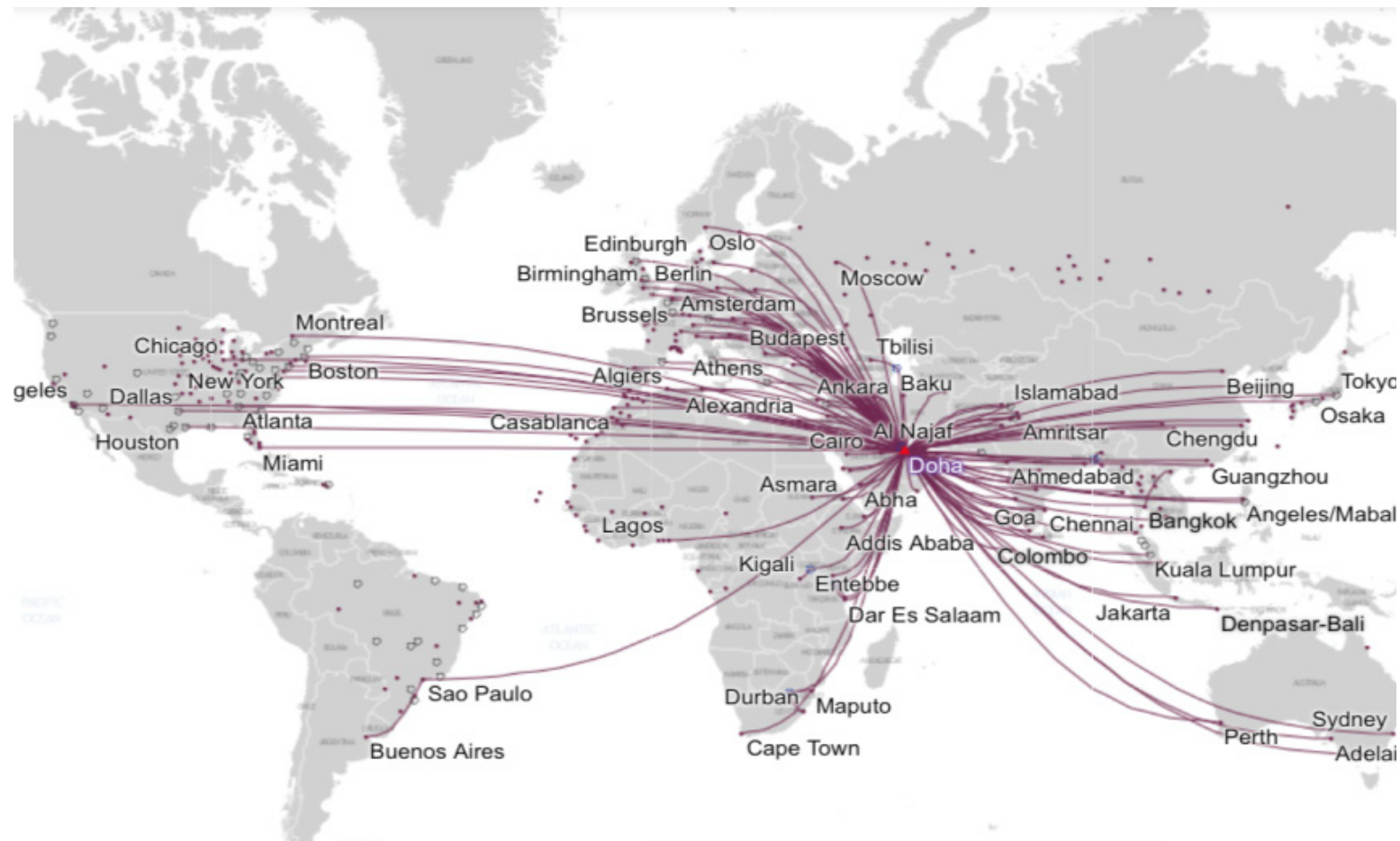
It was not an easy task even for a country like Qatar which is comparatively smaller both territorially and economically. It was only a leader's vision and will power to become successful in the airline field that the maximum profit could be generated. However, it gave a very tough time to TA. This was the same period when Turkish Airlines (TA) was also on the rise with increasing number of fleets and profit too. Eventually, this period also witnessed private airlines in Pakistan which gave a very tough time to PIA and created competition. However, it is true that PIA is a state-owned entity and cannot be compared with a private business which only has three fleets.

From here a diversionary story emerges; one end leads towards success and the other leads towards continuous loss. QA's success is rooted in its re-launching when His Excellency Akbar Al Baker was appointed as Chief Executive in 1997 which turned QA into an award winning entity and the best in the world. It was under his stewardship that QA evolved into a leading force at a regional and global level in the aviation industry. It was with his vision that QA reached a 100 destinations in April 2011 on its global route map.

Just two months after making this record, QA was awarded the Airline of the Year 2011 at the annual Skytrax World Airline Awards with over 18 million travelers worldwide. QA achieved this reward after only 14 years of its launching. It was again acclaimed as the Airline of the Year in July 2012 and 2015. As it was a massive success for QA, the airline ordered various planes such as the Airbus A320 Neos, A380 super jumbos, two Boeing 777 freighters, a mixture of Boeing 777X and Airbus A330 freighters during the Dubai Air Show 2015. The combined orders of 2014 and 2015 were

of more than 330 aircrafts of a total value of 70 Billion US dollars. During the Paris Air Show 2015, QA also ordered 10 firm 777-8Xs and four firm 777 freighters. Their total value was 4.8 Billion US dollars but these orders are to be completed over a period of ten years.

1.7.1 Flights Routes of QA:



QA's massive success can be attributed to good management and its stature as a business entity rather than being state-owned. It is also owed to some managerial reasons. Firstly, it followed a business model while PIA is a government department. QA heavily invested in presenting itself as an international business and tourism. The reasonable strength of employees is also pertinent to mention; there are 150 workers per plane unlike PIA which has 650 works per flight. The total profit of QA in 2015 was \$103 million and it ranked third in the world. This was the same QA which began with four aircrafts in 1997, grew to 28 aircrafts in 2003 and 50 in 2006. Today, QA owns 180 aircrafts and operates in more than 150 destinations across different continents.

1.8 Case Study of Turkish Airlines (TA):

TA has a much longer history than PIA or QA of over nine decades; it is also called the national flag carrier of Turkey with its head office in Istanbul. As compared to QA, TA is operating scheduled services to 280 destinations which is double that of QA in four different continents. This makes TA the fourth-largest carrier in the world due to a high number of destinations and fleet size. TA did not attain this achievement over a decade. It started with 5 airplanes in 1933 but today it owns 200 aircrafts. TA adopted a lot of changes from its inception but its passion, enthusiasm, and quality services to its customers are have remained consistent making it a great airline. That is the only reason due to which TA has the youngest fleet in Europe and QA has the youngest fleet in the Middle East.

1.8.1 Flights Routes of Turkish Airlines :



1.8.2 Success of Turkish Airlines:

TA works under the Ministry of National Defence. Its first international flight was in 1946 from Ankara to Istanbul to Athens. In 1951, Nicosia, Beirut, and Cairo were also included in the flight schedule. Although TA comprises a long history, its true expansion and achievement took place during the 1990s. The total value of its capital stock was 700 billion TL. During that period, a partial privatization was introduced with 1.53 % shares to the public and it was also linked to the State Partnership Administration. Just a year later, the total capital stock reached up to 2 trillion TL and the total number of destinations went up to 69 with 14 domestic and 55 international routes.

The year 1994 witnessed a total capital stock value of 6 trillion TL with the inclusion of A 340-300s plane. During 1995, the total registered capital rose to 6 trillion TL as TA included many new fleets like 3 B737-400, 2 RJ-100, 1 A 340-300, 7 B737-400s series and 3 RJ-100s. Because of these additions, the total capital rose up to 50 Trillion TL in 1996. TA added some new fleets in 1999 including 9 B 737 and 6 A 340-300 aircrafts and with this addition, their total number of fleets reached up to 75 aircrafts carrying 10.6 million passengers in 1999 alone. During that year, the total stock value of TA rose to 175 trillion TL.

1.9 Analysis of PIA Privatization

Other airlines currently working in Pakistan indicate that there are still chances for making a profit and to do better business. According to the Pakistan Aviation Authority, an airline must meet the minimum requirement of 3 planes; this obligation is fulfilled by most of them. PIA owns 26 planes and is still running on loss. Here comes the real question. If a private investor can earn from the same country without any type of state-backing, then why is PIA undergoing continuous loss and inflicting a lasting burden on the public treasury? It shows that PIA suffers from poor management, political interference, unqualified and ill-equipped individuals for technical and professional jobs, overstaffing, and ineffective market strategy.

Some recommendations given by experts specify that PIA can perform better. On the face of it, it seems like an effective program but only time will tell whether it was a successful plan or an inadequate one. The year 2013 witnessed the government's decision to privatize 26% of its shares to the common public. This decision was not implemented because of political rifts among various parties as in economic matters they are playing politics, ultimately a loss to the public treasury.

President Mamnoon Hussein has promulgated the ordinance for the sale of PIA's 26 % shares under the privatization plan. PIA Act 1956 has been repealed with immediate effect through the presidential ordinance. The ordinance will lapse in 120 days so the bill can be presented in parliament. Steps such as the induction of narrow body aircraft and cost cutting measures like route and manpower rationalization at foreign stations were also taken by PIA to control its losses. Owing to these measures, PIA's losses lowered in 2014 as international oil prices were also less. Another recommendation is to hand the management of PIA to another successful airline; the only option on the table is Qatar Airways. The question is whether Qatar Airways will accept such an offer since PIA is continuously running in loss.

Irrespective of PIA's performance, there are many other industries and corporations managed by private owners gaining maximum profits. These include cement, telecommunication, textile, and information technology. If these industries are earning a lot of profit irrespective of their private ownership, then why not PIA. The main job of a government is not to run companies but to provide a regulatory framework for prosperous industries.

1.10 Opposition and Expert Opinions

The current government is taking positive steps towards PIA's privatization; the PIAC Conversion Bill 2015 is a good example. The opposition whose only task is to oppose does have a say in decision-making as without the opposition's approval the government will be unable to implement any decision regarding PIA. Here, politics come before economics. So the bill regarding PIA's partial privatization is still pending as they rejected it in March 2016.

However, according to some scholars and state officials, PIA should be converted into a Public Limited Company. Last year was a decisive one because the Cabinet Secretariat with the collaboration of National Assembly Standing Committee held a meeting about the conversion bill which is still under discussion. Different political parties gave their own opinions regarding this bill. PPP spokesperson Mahreen Razaque said that they didn't even want to discuss the bill and were not in favour of privatization of a national asset. Syed Ali Raza Abidi was of the perspective that if PIA has invested in new planes and a better management structure then there is no need of privatization. Nafeesa Khan Khattak stated that if the government can run expensive projects such as the metro bus project and orange train on its own then why not PIA.

1.11 Conclusion:

Much has been said about PIA; its performance, structure, management, and financial weaknesses. Irrespective of all these facts, PIA was the sole airline which had the privilege to use jet planes for the first time in Asia; that period is called the golden period in the history of Pakistani Civil Aviation Authority (PCCA). Major airlines of that time were trained by PIA officials with technical assistance and provision of jets. It can be called a privilege or an honour for PIA that several successful airlines of the day were inaugurated by PIA for example Emirates, Qatar Airways, and Singapore Airlines. These are just some major examples as there are some other subsidiary companies managed by PIA not only in Pakistan but throughout the world.

Collectively speaking these are not running in profit especially during the current decade. This indicates some grave managerial problem since after its inception, PIA was successful and other countries looked at it as a role model. Some other airlines are also working in Pakistan although not too many in number but they are self-sufficient enough to make their own profit. A situation like this only leaves the option of partial privatization as it is not the job of government to run a business but rather to regulate it with different measures such as effective and equal implementation of the tax system. If the government begins to regulate businesses, then who will maintain law and order for a better and prosperous economy?

Because of nominal economic development, a huge number of Pakistanis are living in the Middle East, North America, Canada, and Australia. The number goes up to 10 million. These people regularly visit Pakistan so they need a reliable airline; in this scenario, the privatization of PIA must be executed with proper planning in which a monopoly can be avoided. The recent crash of flight PK-661 near Abbottabad without a single survival also indicates officials' inefficiency who are unable to avoid such events. However, lobbying groups of different political parties within parliament and senate are not clear about how to handle the situation. Since previous five years there is much discussion without any conclusion and this hints at political objectives within the corporation.

The current government still has an opportunity to review the PIAC Conversion Bill 2015 and implement it as soon as possible. Even the government is not in position to bail out PIA one more time with an amount of Rs300 billion. As always such an amount was and will be a burden on the public treasury. This means that even a person who never travels on PIA and doesn't even have a passport is paying the running cost of PIA indirectly. It creates a multi-faceted dilemma for the general public who are just fulfilling their basic livelihood. Why should they pay such an amount without eliciting any benefit?

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