

5 yrs on, India, China to restart direct flights later this month

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suspended since early 2020, initially because of the pandemic and later because of military and political tensions. India's efforts to normalise the relationship have acquired a greater sense of urgency because of its recent experience with the Trump administration.

Both countries had agreed in principle to resume air services in Jan during foreign secretary Vikram Misri's visit. Since then, said MEA, civil aviation authorities had been engaged in

technical-level discussions on resuming direct air services and on a revised Air Services Agreement.

Shortly after MEA's announcement, IndiGo said it would start a daily nonstop between Kolkata and Guangzhou from Oct 26. The airline will fly between Delhi and Guangzhou, the date for which will be announced shortly. Air India is likely to resume China flights with a nonstop between Delhi and Shanghai by the year-end, say sources.

IndiGo said its "familiarity with local partners" enabled it to resume these flights swiftly. IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers said: "This will once again allow seamless movement of people, goods, and ideas, while also strengthening bilateral ties between two of the world's most populous countries and fast-growing economies..." The flights between Kolkata and Guangzhou will open for sale from Friday.

New Delhi: In the middle of Dussehra festivities, India Thursday announced resumption of direct air services with China from late Oct, marking another significant step in efforts to normalise the relationship that saw PM Narendra Modi visiting Tianjin last month for the SCO summit and also having a bilateral meeting with President Xi Jinping.

This is the second major step taken by India to facilitate regular exchanges between the two countries, after govt resumed tourist visas for Chinese nationals.

Govt said in a statement that the agreement between civil aviation authorities would further ease people-to-people contact between India and China, contributing towards gradual normalisation of bilateral exchanges, and economic cooperation.

Direct flights remained

France to try Chinese captain of Russia 'shadow fleet' vessel

Rennes: French court will try the Chinese captain of a tanker from Russia's "shadow fleet" early next year after it was intercepted off France, prosecutors said Thursday, in a move seen as a message to Moscow over its efforts to skirt oil sanctions.

The French navy on Saturday stopped the Boracay, a vessel claiming to be flagged in Benin and blacklisted by the European Union for being part of Russia's sanction-busting "shadow fleet" of ageing oil tankers, according to the public prosecutor's office in the northwestern city of Brest.

The vessel was probed over inconsistencies in where the tanker was registered while it was carrying a "large cargo of oil" from Russia to India, it added.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday condemned the operation calling it an act of piracy. Putin accused France of staging the incident to try to distract attention from what he called the very difficult political situation in the country.

The captain and first mate of the Boracay were detained on Tuesday over refusing to provide evidence of nationality, the prosecutor's office said. The captain has been told to appear in court in Feb, but the first mate has been released, it said. AFP



President Zelensky on Thursday warned that Russia's bombardment of Ukraine's power grid is deepening concerns about the safety of its nuclear facilities

Putin: Will respond swiftly if Europe provokes Russia

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that Russia will respond swiftly if it thinks Europe is provoking it and said that almost all of the US-led Nato alliance was now fighting against Russia over Ukraine. Putin, speaking in Sochi, said Russian forces were advancing along the entire front in Ukraine. "All the Nato countries are fighting with us," Putin said. Nato members, he said, were providing Ukraine with intelligence, weapons and training. Should Europe provoke Russia, he said, the response would be swift. "If anyone still has a desire to compete with us in the military sphere, as we say, feel free, let them try," Putin said. "Russia's countermeasures will not be long in coming." REUTERS

UN council: India rips Pak for its hypocrisy on rights

Calls It 'A Country With Worst Record'

Geneva: India slammed Pakistan at the 60th session of United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, for its "hypocrisy" on human rights and highlighting the persecution of minorities within Pakistan.

Representing India, diplomat Mohammed Hussain said it was "deeply ironic" that a country with one of the worst human rights records was attempting to lecture others.

"They misuse this forum with fabricated allegations against India, which only expose their hypocrisy," he said, addressing the 34th council meeting.

Hussain said instead of resorting to propaganda, Pakistan should confront its "state-sponsored persecution and systematic discrimination" against its own religious and ethnic minorities.

Subsequently at the 35th meeting, using the right to

Our fight against terror continues: Min

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Talking about the intense cross-border hostilities under Operation Sindoor from May 7 to 10, Rajnath said Pakistan made failed attempts to penetrate India's defences along the LoC and International Border stretching from Leh to the Sir Creek region by launching multiple waves of drones and some missiles. The Indian response "exposed the weaknesses of Pakistan's air defence", Rajnath said. Despite its superior capability, India showed restraint because its military action was targeted against terrorism and its training hubs. "The objective of Operation Sindoor was not to escalate and start a war. I am happy that the Indian armed forces successfully achieved all the military objectives of Operation Sindoor. However, our fight against terrorism continues," he said.

reply Pakistan's envoy Abbas Sarwar accused India of deflecting attention from what he called the "dire human rights situation" in J&K. "The Indian govt has made yet another futile claim to avoid scrutiny of its record in the territory," he said, repeating Islamabad's long-standing line on Kashmir. He alleged that the situation in Ladakh exposed the "truth of India's illegal measures of Aug 2019."

The exchange came against the backdrop of growing discontent inside Pakistan-occupied J&K(PoJK). Nasir

Aziz Khan, spokesperson of the United Kashmir People's National Party (UKPNP), addressed the UNHRC, urging international intervention against what he described as Pakistan's intensifying repression in the region.

Khan highlighted recent protests in PoJK, including a complete shutdown and wheel-jam strike on Sept 29, led by the Joint Awami Action Committee. He accused Islamabad of deploying Rangers, suspending internet services, and imposing a communication blackout to stifle dissent. ANI

Leh still in shock, but firm on statehood

'How Can We Be A Threat When We Have Paid With Our Lives For Nation'

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Leh: At Martyrs' Park, about 1km from the Ladakh Hill Development Council (LAHDC-Leh) office, the gate stood open during curfew relaxation on Oct 6. Inside, chairs were stacked and a tent was dismantled. Labourers were quietly loading chairs, tent covers and iron rods into a vehicle, their faces grim.

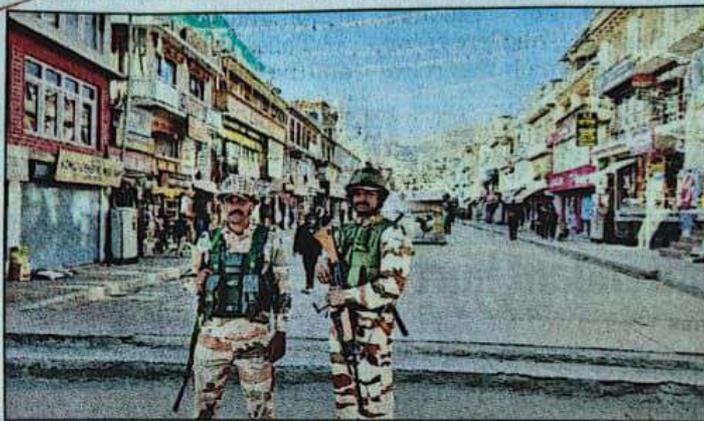
It was here that environmental activist Sonam Wangchuk began a 35-day hunger strike Sept 10, demanding Sixth Schedule protections and statehood for Ladakh. "We provide tents on rent. They called us to take it back," a worker said. Startled at the sight of a reporter, he said, "Please go away, cops will come and we will be in trouble."

A woman entered with her child. "I was on hunger strike on Sept 24 when the situation worsened outside," she said. "Out of fear, some of us ran in different directions. My husband later picked me up. I came back to collect my belongings."

On Sept 4, security forces opened fire on protesters demanding Sixth Schedule status, killing four and injuring dozens. Wangchuk called off his hunger strike hours later. Authorities said the police fired in self-defence after protesters tried to set ablaze a vehicle carrying security personnel. Police also claimed that without CRPF deployment, "the whole of Leh would have burnt".

Outside the park, another woman voiced her anger. "Why were people fired upon? Four people are dead. Will they give us Sixth Schedule?"

About 1km away BJP's Ladakh office, which was set on fire, was under heavy guard with spools of concertina wire around it. Cops prohibit



Security forces stand guard at a market area in Leh on Thursday

photography of the building.

At the LAHDC-Leh office, the main gate was open but there was no one there. "Since Sept 24, chief executive officer Tashi Gyalsen and others haven't come to office. In fact, no one comes," a peon said.

Mustafa Ladakhi, 36, a PhD from JNU, is among a growing number of Ladakhis at the country's top universities concerned about home. At a hotel near Leh airport, he said the region is still in shock.

"On Sept 24, my mother was on a hunger strike led by Wangchuk. There was chaos when she called me. I found her in the middle of the road. I will never forget the pain that day brought to Ladakhis," he said. "No official has stepped down. There is no empathy. There is no apology. Instead, we are accused in the national media of destabilising the central govt... How can we be a threat when we have paid with our lives for the nation?"

He argued that UT status without statehood had buried local governance under bureaucracy. "Instead of empowering local govt, we have the lieutenant governor's office and its bureaucracy, commissioner secretaries, the DC's office, and the police bureaucracy. They have nothing to do in Ladakh. All we see is pomp and a show of bureaucracy... Allow us to govern ourselves," he said.

"When we were part of J&K, AFSPA was never extended to Ladakh because govt knew we were Indian

nationalists. Why this labelling now?" he asked.

Ladakhi's friend, a hotel owner, said, "I don't want to talk about tourism. This is a colossal tragedy. Four deaths in a place like Ladakh are like 400 in Delhi. Sept 24 will remain etched in our memory."

In Upper Tukchal area of Leh, Rigzin Wangmo Lachic, president of All Ladakh Hotel and Guest House Association, echoed similar sentiments and demanded a judicial inquiry. "The events have shattered us and left a wound on our collective soul," she said.

At a hotel serving Kashmiri wazwan on Oct 1, during curfew relaxation, the receptionist from Doda said he no longer felt safe. "I've been here 10 years and never faced hostility. But after the lieutenant governor described workers from Doda and Nepal as 'external forces' responsible for the crisis, we are not stepping out much."

As curfew returned, shops shut ahead of the 6 pm deadline. "We comply with every direction. But govt must fulfil our four demands, including Sixth Schedule and statehood," Gelek Punchok, 42, a member of Leh Apex Body, said. Punchok was outside the district jail, with many others, to receive around 26 prisoners released Thursday after they were given bail. Many of the released detainees said they had nothing to do with the Sept 24 violence but stated that they were with the "peaceful" struggle for Sixth Schedule status and statehood.

Road to Karachi is through Sir Creek: Rajnath to Pak

Warns Neighbour About Its Military Infra Build-Up

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Warning Pakistan about its recent military infrastructure build-up near the sensitive Sir Creek region, defence minister Rajnath Singh Thursday said this shows its

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“true intentions”. Any misadventure by the neighbour would result in a response “so strong it will change both history and geography” of the area, he warned.

“In 1965 (war), Indian Army showed courage by reaching Lahore. In 2025, Pakistan must remember that the road to Karachi also passes through the Creek,” Singh said after performing *shastra* (arms) puja at Bhuj military station in Gujarat.

The marshlands of Sir Cre-

India won't allow its humiliation: Putin

Russian president Vladimir Putin Thursday warned US against pressuring India to stop buying Russian oil. “...the people of a country like India will closely monitor decisions made by the political leadership and will never allow any humiliation in front of anyone... I know PM Modi; he himself would never take any steps of this kind,” Putin said.

ek, a 96-km-long tidal estuary between Rann of Kutch and Pakistan's Sindh, have been a bone of contention between the neighbours due to differing interpretations of the maritime boundary in the region. The long-standing dispute has implications for access to fishing rights and potential natural resources like oil and gas in the region and affects drawing of maritime boundaries and EEZs in Arabian Sea.

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In a 1st, India set to host a Taliban minister next wk

New Delhi: The stunning turnaround in India's ties with Taliban in the past few years on the back of its humanitarian aid for the people of Afghanistan is set to intensify further with a likely visit by acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to India on Oct 9-10.

He is expected to meet external affairs minister S Jaishankar on the second day of the first trip to India by a senior Taliban official since the group took over the reins of Afghanistan in 2021.

New Delhi had been in touch with Kabul since Aug for Muttaqi's visit, reports **Sachin Parashar**. As he faces a UNSC travel ban, India approached the Council for a waiver. It's understood the request has now been granted, allowing the Centre to finalise the dates.

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