

Thursday 28th February, 2019

Dear Mustafa,

On my trips to Karachi I have been a strong supporter of flying Pakistan International Airways. This has always mystified my friends in Karachi for whom PIA is known as 'Please Inform Allah'.

Until yesterday I had never had a problem, but then as I was waiting in the lounge to board the London flight all Pakistani airspace was shut down. In an expected military escalation with India a couple of planes were shot down in the northern Kashmir region and a pilot was captured. The Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority took immediate action.

Karachi airport is next to a military base, a definite target, and therefore there was a certain urgency to get out. This of course meant re-entering Pakistan (as we were on the air side), going through passport control, picking up the luggage and grabbing the first available car.

The last part of this was impossible as no cars were allowed to enter the airport complex. At this point I was kindly adopted by someone who recognised me from an earlier dinner party and we loaded our bags onto trolleys and 'off-roaded' it about half a kilometre to the airport perimeter and a make-shift taxi rank. This was an adventure that ended with a cup of tea and late lunch at a good friend's home, who now has an unexpected house guest.

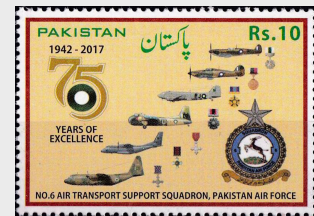
The rest of the day was a mixture of the serious and the

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surreal. The serious was in the form of an excellent address to the nation by Imran Khan. When I watch him I cannot help but think that Pakistan is on an upward swing, even if his delivery has more than a touch of the 'Tony Blair' about it.

The surreal was an often replayed interview with the captured Indian pilot in which the main point of contention was that he slurped his tea. We are in a unique part of the world where "They never know how to drink their tea" can be a genuine national insult.

More seriously though this is the first 'black swan' incident I have been caught up in and it is a good reminder that things do not always go according to a schedule. With the Donald in the Whitehouse and Brexit rumbling on, the chances of Black Swan events in geo-politics are higher than ever. The current India-Pakistan issue came out of the blue, although it is noteworthy that The Indian elections are in May, and Modi's campaign had been stuttering.

As of now the airspace remains closed but I am ticketed on a flight leaving tomorrow via Oman.

Therefore I will see you next week 'inshallah'

Chris