Kazakh Ambassador and Jazeera Airways CEO explore opportunities to restart direct flights and strengthen tourism

Jazeera Airways committed to restoring Kazakhstan connection

KUWAIT CITY, Oct 13: His Excellency Yerzhan Yelekeyev, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the State of Kuwait met with Barathan Pasupathi, Chief Executive Officer – Jazeera Airways to explore opportunities to strengthen air connectivity between the two countries. Discussions focused on the importance of restoring direct air links to facilitate tourism and trade, enhance people-to-people connections, and further strengthen bilateral ties between Kuwait and Kazakhstan.

H.E. Yerzhan Yelekeyev, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the State of Kuwait said: "Kazakhstan offers significant appeal to travelers from Kuwait, thanks to its unique natural landscapes, well-developed tourism infrastructure, and diverse leisure opportunities. Direct air connectivity plays a key role in unlocking this potential. We are keen to see Jazeera Airways resume its flights to Kazakhstan and stand ready to provide the necessary support to facilitate further cooperation. I am confident that the restoration of direct flights, once conditions permit, will provide fresh impetus to mutual tourism, strengthen trade and economic ties, including by facilitating increased exports of Kazakh products to the Kuwaiti market, and foster closer business contacts between our two countries."



Kazakhstan Ambassador meets Jazeera CEO.

Jazeera Airways reaffirmed its continued commitment to the Kazakhstan market and its interest in restoring direct flights once prevailing airspace restrictions ease and operating conditions allow.

Barathan Pasupathi, Chief Executive Officer, Jazeera Airways, said: "We thank His Excellency Ambassador Yelekeyev for his continued engagement and support. Jazeera Airways began flying to Almaty in 2021, and while operations were subsequently suspended, Kazakhstan remains an important market for us. We greatly value the strong links between our two countries and recognize the important role direct air connectivity plays in supporting tourism, business and wider bilateral relations. We remain committed to Kazakhstan and look forward to restoring connectivity when airspace conditions allow us to do so safely and sustainably."

Jazeera Airways currently operates to more than 50 destinations across the Middle East, Asia, Europe and Africa, connecting Kuwait with key business and leisure markets. The airline continues to strengthen and expand its network, opening new destinations and restoring routes in response to customer demand and market opportunities, while supporting Kuwait's position as a growing regional air transport hub.

Weyay Bank, Houna, and AUK launch initiative to foster mental health awareness among youth

KUWAIT CITY, Oct 13: Reinforcing its commitment to supporting and empowering young people beyond banking services, Weyay Bank, in collaboration with Houna, a specialized mental health platform, and in partnership with the American University of Kuwait (AUK), launched a mental health awareness initiative aimed at fostering open conversations around mental well-being and providing students with a safe and supportive space on campus.



Al-Sharrah

The initiative reflects Weyay Bank's belief in being a genuine partner to youth by addressing not only their financial needs but also their overall well-being. Through this collaboration, Weyay seeks to better understand the daily and academic pressures facing university students and contribute to building a healthier, more supportive environment where they can thrive.

The initiative aims to reinforce the message that prioritizing mental well-being and asking for help are positive and courageous steps toward personal growth and resilience.

The partnership between Weyay Bank, Houna, and AUK serves as a strong example of how the private sector, specialized organizations, and educational institutions can work together to create a more aware, inclusive, and supportive campus culture for young people.

The event featured a range of interactive activities designed to engage students in meaningful conversations around mental health. One of the key highlights was an interactive messaging experience, which allowed students to select a mental health topic or challenge relevant to them and receive personalized guidance and supportive messages tailored to their experiences and needs.

The initiative also included a variety of awareness activities aimed at promoting self-care, positivity, and emotional resilience among students, encouraging them to prioritize their mental well-being as part of their everyday lives.

Throughout the event, mental health specialists from Houna were present to provide guidance, answer students' questions, and raise awareness about the resources and support services available to those seeking professional assistance.

Commenting on the initiative, **Fahad Al-Sharrah**, the Communication Manager at Weyay Bank said: "At Weyay, we believe our role as a youth-focused brand extends far beyond banking services. Through our partnership with Houna and the American University of Kuwait, we aim to place mental well-being at the forefront of conversations that matter to young people. We want students to know that speaking openly about mental health challenges and seeking support are healthy, empowering steps. We hope this initiative encourages more open dialogue and strengthens a culture of understanding, empathy, and support across the university community."



Photos during the campaign.

This initiative forms part of Weyay Bank's broader commitment to social responsibility and its ongoing efforts to better understand and support young people at every stage of their lives through impactful programs and initiatives that contribute to their well-being, personal development, and future success.

From 'hands-free' to 'eyes-off'

Automakers pursue safer autonomous driving tech

WARREN, Oct 13, (AP): At the General Motors Global Technical Center in Warren, Michigan, in suburban Detroit, hundreds of volunteer, real-world drivers have hopped inside a Cadillac Lyriq electric vehicle or other popular GM models and experienced all sorts of things while in the car: regular roadway driving, driving up and down hills, construction, rain, nearby traffic and other scenarios.

But while the vehicle is real, the world that the drivers are experiencing is not. Instead, they're inside a simulator; a 360-degree, immersive environment where their every eye movement, heart stress, sweating and other reactions are measured against countless driving tests. Here, GM is testing a human driver's response in vehicles just as much as it's testing the vehicle tech itself.

That simulation is how GM - and other automakers - are testing future iterations of their advanced driver assistance systems. Also called ADAS, this technology so far allows for well-known vehicle features such as automatic emergency braking, blind spot warnings, lane departure warnings, lane-centering assist, surround-view cameras, driver attention monitors and many more.

These features let drivers go "hands-free" at certain times, particularly while on the highway.

Automakers anticipate that these systems will eventually grow so advanced that drivers will be allowed to safely take their hands off the wheel, and their eyes off the road. But the race is not only about the technology itself, but the payoff, which is a big one. Automakers with the best tech will get more consumers to subscribe to those capabilities, making automated driving a lucrative play for the industry.

"Going eyes off is really the turning point where consumers will be more willing to pay for this feature, because when you go eyes off, now you're really potentially giving the driver back some time, because they don't have to be paying attention to the road," said Sam Abuelsamid, vice president of market research at firm Telemetry. "That's where they see the real value proposition."

GM says its version will be possible by 2028, when it's launching the next Super Cruise on the Cadillac Escalade IQ luxury electric sport utility vehicle. Others are on their heels.

"2028 is the broad timeline when there's a whole group of companies that are all targeting launching systems like this that can operate at highway speeds," Abuelsamid added, "on a wider variety of roads than what we see with a lot of the systems today."

Since 2017, GM has sold vehicles with Super Cruise, a hands-free, assisted driving system - notably not self-driving - that's available to use on over 630,000 roads in the U.S. and Canada, and more around the world.

"You can take your hands off the wheel and keep your eyes on the roads, but safely enjoy a de-stressed drive on those roads in your normal, everyday commutes," said Tyson Becker, GM executive director for autonomous vehicle strategy and product.

There are now more than 20 different GM models across its four brands - Cadillac, GMC, Buick and Chevrolet - equipped with the technology. The automaker plans to expand the number of models available with Super Cruise in the coming years with the ultimate goal of launching the next generation of Super Cruise, technology that allows for safe, "eyes-off" driving.

"What we're talking about is truly a technology that is so safe that it allows you to take your eyes off the road while it's active, and do other things in the cabin, whether that is looking at your phone, looking at your laptop, taking a meeting, watching a movie," Becker added.

One of the most challenging aspects of developing autonomous technology is predicting, and getting a vehicle to respond to countless, unexpected scenarios while on the road.

That could mean a dog, deer, or even a child, sprinting onto a road; a detour unforeseen on a navigation app or a suddenly active construction zone. A driver - or in this case, the technology - needs to be able to recognize that the immediate environment has changed, and to respond in a safe way.

That's largely where simulation, combined with data collection and artificial intelligence, comes in.

In GM simulations, drivers of all experience levels take the wheel and face a multitude of computer-generated scenarios on highways or urban landscapes replete with other "humans" and roadway signage.

"We want to really be able to take anything that our customers could experience out on the road," said Maureen August, senior manager at GM Research & Development.

As participants drive in the simulator, GM looks at key data points, like heart rate, stress, where the driver's eyes are going, how long they are looking at one part of the road or another and how they are attending to the road, all from a nearby control room.

One of the best ways to test driver attention these days: inviting drivers to play Candy Crush.

"We found it's very effective for getting people involved and wanting to get the highest score," August said. "It's a great way for us to get you engaged and then have to pull you away from a task."

After participants drive, they're asked how they felt, how they understood the system, and whether it was intuitive. Other factors GM looks at include comfort, how convenient certain features are to use, whether a driver feels the system is trustworthy and how many seconds are required for a driver to take full control of a moving vehicle.

"We want to make sure that you're responding effectively and that we've given you the alert far enough ahead that you can take over if needed," August said. "But we also want to be sure that if you feel comfortable and the vehicle is capable, that you don't take over, that you let the vehicle do what it's capable of doing."

Hands-off technology is being deployed by many automakers today; Ford's BlueCruise is among the more notable examples.

BlueCruise is available in equipped Ford vehicles for use on more than 130,000 miles of certain North American roads.

Tesla lists technology used in its cars as "Full Self-Driving," but it still requires human oversight.

As for more advanced systems, there aren't any passenger vehicles in production with eyes-off technology now - some tech companies, however, offer autonomous commercial robotaxi services in select cities.

Far smaller rollouts of sophisticated light-duty driving systems from various auto companies have been available in limited markets in recent years, but have been discontinued.

In addition to the technology challenges, there are regulatory hurdles, experts say.

"There isn't really much in the way of real regulation that governs these systems today," Telemetry's Abuelsamid said. "And so, the automakers are basically going state by state to get approvals for where they can operate these systems."

Because of that, he said, "it remains to be seen where GM will be able to offer their eyes off system come 2028."

Ultimately, automakers are racing toward more advanced tech, not only to make their vehicles more enticing, but also to leverage subscription fees customers will pay to have the technology onboard.

The name of the game, Abuelsamid said, is "to provide enough convenience and safety, the consumers will be willing to pay a recurring fee to use it ... so drivers can do things like watch a video, read a book, text - without having to watch the road all the time."

Tensions flare over the European Union's next long-term budget ahead of unpredictable elections in '27

BRUSSELS, Oct 13, (AP): Political tensions mounted Tuesday over the European Union's next long-term budget as pressure builds to get the spending package agreed before a series of unpredictable elections in some of the biggest member countries next year.

The EU budget, known as the multiannual financial framework, amounts to around 1.2% of the 27-nation bloc's gross national income. The MFF is financed mostly by the member countries based on the size of their economies.

The spending plan is the cash point where EU ambitions, conflicting policy priorities and economic realities collide and must be endorsed by all member countries and the European Parliament.

The 2028-2034 budget is being negotiated as the EU faces outside challenges including supporting Ukraine as it fights off the Russian invasion and remaining competitive in the face of high energy prices and trade tensions with the United States and China.

Inside the union, elections in France, Italy, Poland and Spain later this year and next year could test the resilience of the world's biggest trading bloc, with the hard right leading in opinion polls in France and results in Poland and Spain difficult to predict.

Over the weekend, Ireland, which holds the EU's rotating presidency, proposed to set the budget at 1.62 trillion euros ($1.81 trillion). That is a 30% increase over the current seven-year package, but 8% less than what the European Commission wants.

Sweden, one of about eight countries known as net contributors paying more into the budget than they receive back in allocations, insists "several hundred billion euros" more in cuts are needed.

"It's wildly unaffordable, and the volume must go down," Sweden's EU Affairs Minister Jessica Rosencrantz said as she and her counterparts met to chew over the Irish presidency proposal ahead of an EU leadership summit later this week.

The Irish plan would mean "a 60% increase in the Swedish contribution" that amounts to "a fee for the Swedish taxpayers to pick up, which limits us to make the necessary priorities back home," Rosencrantz said.

On Sunday, Chancellor Friedrich Merz of Germany, Europe's biggest economy and a major net budget contributor, welcomed Ireland's "tireless efforts" but said "we are still a long way from reaching an agreement."

"The EU budget must be affordable for those who bear the main burden of financing," said Merz, who will from Thursday join his counterparts in Brussels for two days of talks. "Everyone must contribute to the necessary adjustments."

That "everyone" was a reference to countries rejecting cuts to cohesion funds for Europe's poorer regions, or to agriculture policy, which subsidizes the continent's farmers. Combined, this money accounts for about two-thirds of the budget.

Ultimately, if countries aren't willing to stump up more cash, then either farm or cohesion spending must shrink or Europe's ambitions on defense, competitiveness and other priorities scaled back. Unless money can be found elsewhere.

Despite the uncertainty, Ireland's EU Affairs Minister Thomas Byrne thinks the presidency has laid a good foundation for negotiations in the days and weeks ahead.

"That was our task, to find that basis," he told reporters in Luxembourg before chairing Tuesday's meeting. "We weren't asked to find a basis for agreement. That will come later."

Indeed, most of the parties involved are complaining more or less equally and none of them have yet walked away, which may be a good sign.

"Nobody's going to get everything that they want. But we hope that there'll be something there for everybody," Byrne said.

Still, the negotiations are gathering pace just as ambitions for the EU in an uncertain world are on the rise but room for fiscal maneuver in many countries is disappearing.

The MFF is tiny compared with national budgets, but France, Italy and Belgium are mired in debt and oppose paying more.

As a bloc, the EU is not allowed to levy taxes, but does earn revenue from mechanisms such as customs duties and value added tax. The commission is looking for new ways to raise its "own resources" through the carbon emissions trading system and a new tobacco duty, among other measures.

Whatever happens, missing the end of December "deadline" does not mean that money runs out. Nations have another year, but much time is needed to adopt legislation on spending programs and approve it all so money can be flowing by January 2028.

In a letter inviting leaders to the summit, European Council President António Costa said clinching a "timely agreement" is "essential to provide our economies with the predictability and stability they need in an unstable and unpredictable world."

"I count on your leadership and collaborative spirit," Costa wrote.