

Mohammad Asghar

PIA plans direct flights for US

RAWALPINDI: The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) is likely to start direct flights to the United States in May this year, but only after a final clearance by the US government's Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

A TSA team is expected in Pakistan early next month to carry out a "second level" inspection.

Abdullah Hafeez, a PIA spokesman, said on Wednesday that Pakistani authorities would conduct security checks on passengers at airports in accordance with US requirements.

"All the security scanning and checks will be conducted by Pakistani staff," the spokesman said.

He further said Pakistan had complied with all recommendations of the US transport authority, such as the use of screening machines at major airports, including Islamabad and Karachi.

Mr Hafeez said negotiations between the US administration and the national airline had been going on for the last two years, adding that "at our end we have taken all measures advised by the other side".

He said direct flights for the United States would resume only after completion of the second level security inspection and submission of a report to the US transport security authority.

He said the flight plan prepared by PIA proposes three weekly flights for New York to begin with. The number of flights will go up with the passage of time and in keeping with passenger response.

According to the official, the US Transport Security Authority had conducted an audit of security arrangements of the PIA fleet and at the country's major airports.

Owing to security concerns, the US has so far not allowed direct flights from Pakistani airports into its airspace.

The national flag carrier had discontinued its flights to the US in October 2017 because of rising operational costs and in an attempt to cut losses.