CASE STUDY

IMPACT OF KABUL FIR CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS AND AIRSPACE CLOSURES WITHIN THE MIDDLE EAST

Presented by

PAKISTAN

(PAKISTAN AIRPORTS AUTHORITY / ANSP)

7/13/2026

About the Presenter

- **Active Air Traffic Controller since 2008** ***(18 lovely years & counting)***
- **Worked in HQ PAA for around 4 years on ATM and ATS Training Portfolios**
- **Currently working as the Approach / Area Surveillance Controller at Lahore Area Control Center**

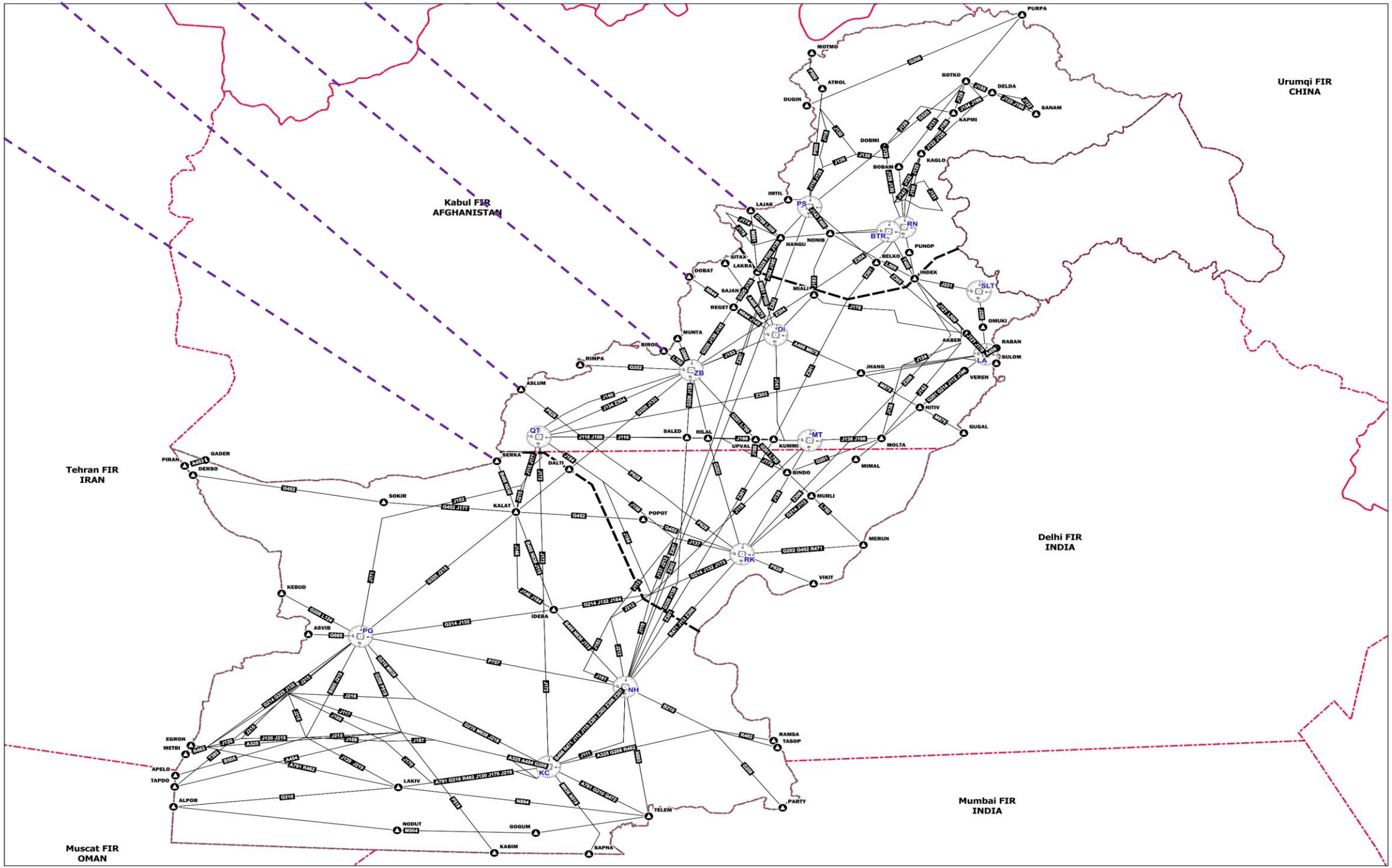
SALMAN NAZAR

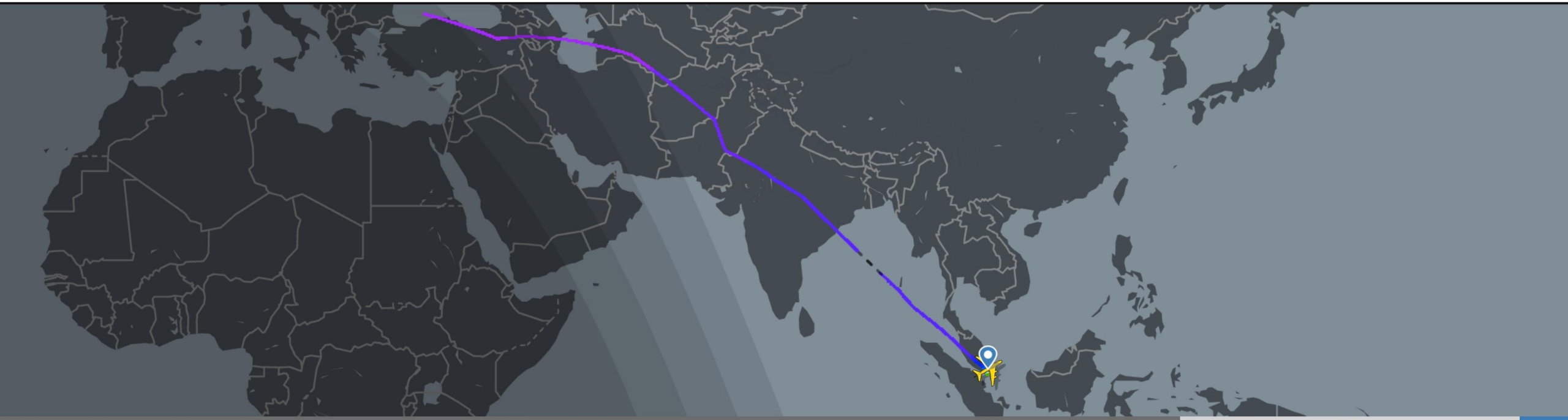
SENIOR JOINT DIRECTOR (ATS)
PAKISTAN AIRPORTS AUTHORITY
(AIR NAVIGATION SERVICE PROVIDER)

Outline

- **Introduction**
- **Timeline** of the events 2021 - 2024
- **Overview** of Kabul Fir Contingency Procedures From August 2021 To August 2025
- **Timeline** of the events 2024 - 2025
- Overview of **Initiatives** taken by Pakistan in collaboration with ICAO and neighboring states
- Airspace Contingency due **Middle East Escalation**
- **Tactical** Measures by ATC
- **Key** take aways and Lesson **learned**

INTRODUCTION


Kabul FIR
AFGHANISTAN
Urumqi FIR
CHINA
Tehran FIR
IRAN
Delhi FIR
INDIA
Mumbai FIR
INDIA
Muscat FIR
OMAN
PURPA
MOTMO
GOTKO
DELDA
SANAM
KAPMI
ATROL
DUGIN
DOBMI
KAGLO
BOBAM
IMTIL
LAJAK
PS
RN
BTR
HANGU
NONIB
PUNOP
SITAX
LAKRA
DOBAT
BELKO
INDEX
SAJAN
MIALI
SLT
REGET
OMUKI
MUNTA
BIROL
DI
AKBER
RABAN
SULOM
RIMPA
ZB
LA
JHANG
VEREN
ASLUM
NITIV
GUGAL
QT
SALED
HILAL
UPVAL
KUMMI
MT
MOLTA
SERKA
DALTI
BINDO
MIMAL
PIRAN
GADER
DERBO
SOKIR
KALAT
POPOT
MURLI
MERUN
RK
VIKIT
KEBUD
IDEBA
ASVIB
PG
NH
EGRON
METBI
APELO
TAPDO
LAKIV
ALPOR
RAMSA
TASOP
KC
PARTY
TELEM
NODUT
GOGUM
KABIM
SAPNA



Playback of flight SQ308 / SIA308

GREAT CIRCLE DISTANCE
10,888 KM

AVERAGE FLIGHT TIME
13:14

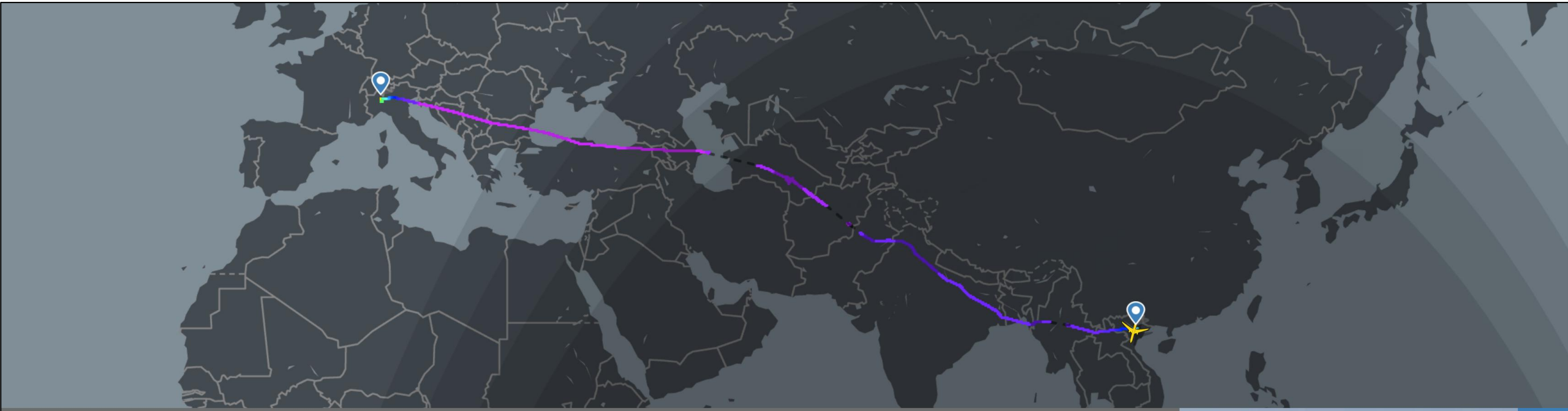
ACTUAL FLIGHT TIME
-

FROM
Singapore (SIN)

TO
London (LHR)

© Leonard Damm | Jetphotos

AIRCRAFT
Airbus A380-841



Playback of flight VN73 / HVN73

GREAT CIRCLE DISTANCE
8,879 KM

AVERAGE FLIGHT TIME
11:21

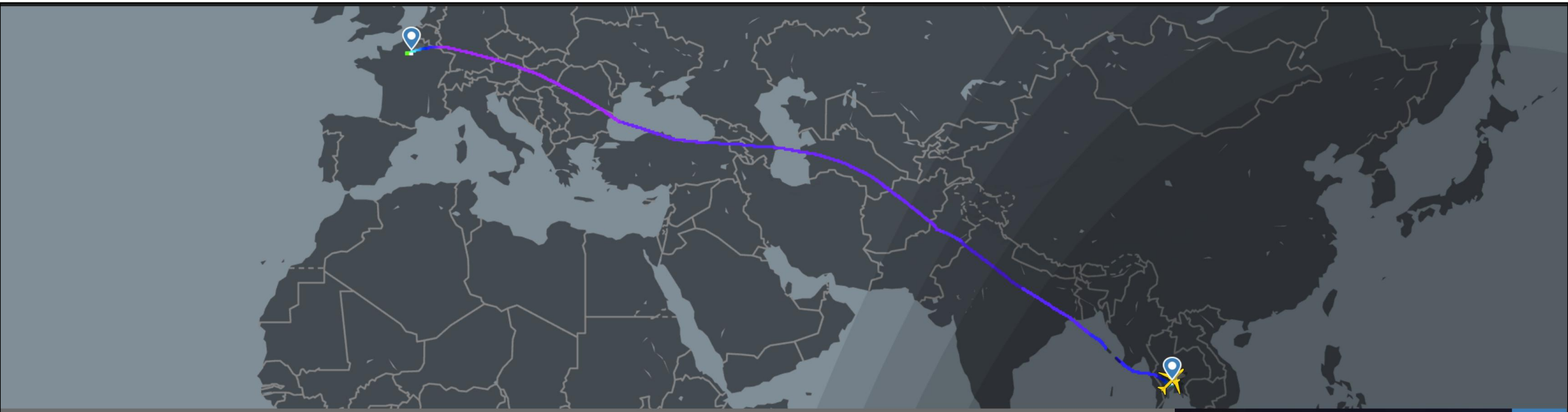
ACTUAL FLIGHT TIME
11:13

FROM
Hanoi (HAN)

TO
Milan (MXP)

© Lance Adrianne Lim | Jetphotos

AIRCRAFT
Airbus A350-941



Playback of flight TG930 / THA930

GREAT CIRCLE DISTANCE
9,459 KM

AVERAGE FLIGHT TIME
11:44

ACTUAL FLIGHT TIME
11:44

FROM
Bangkok (BKK)

TO
Paris (CDG)

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AIRCRAFT
Boeing 777-3D7(ER)

THAI

Lufthansa

BRITISH AIRWAYS

TURKISH AIRLINES

EVA AIR

SINGAPORE AIRLINES

CHINA AIRLINES

SWISS

Austrian

malaysia airlines

AIR CANADA

condor

FINNAIR

virgin atlantic

AZERBAIJAN AIRLINES

QANTAS

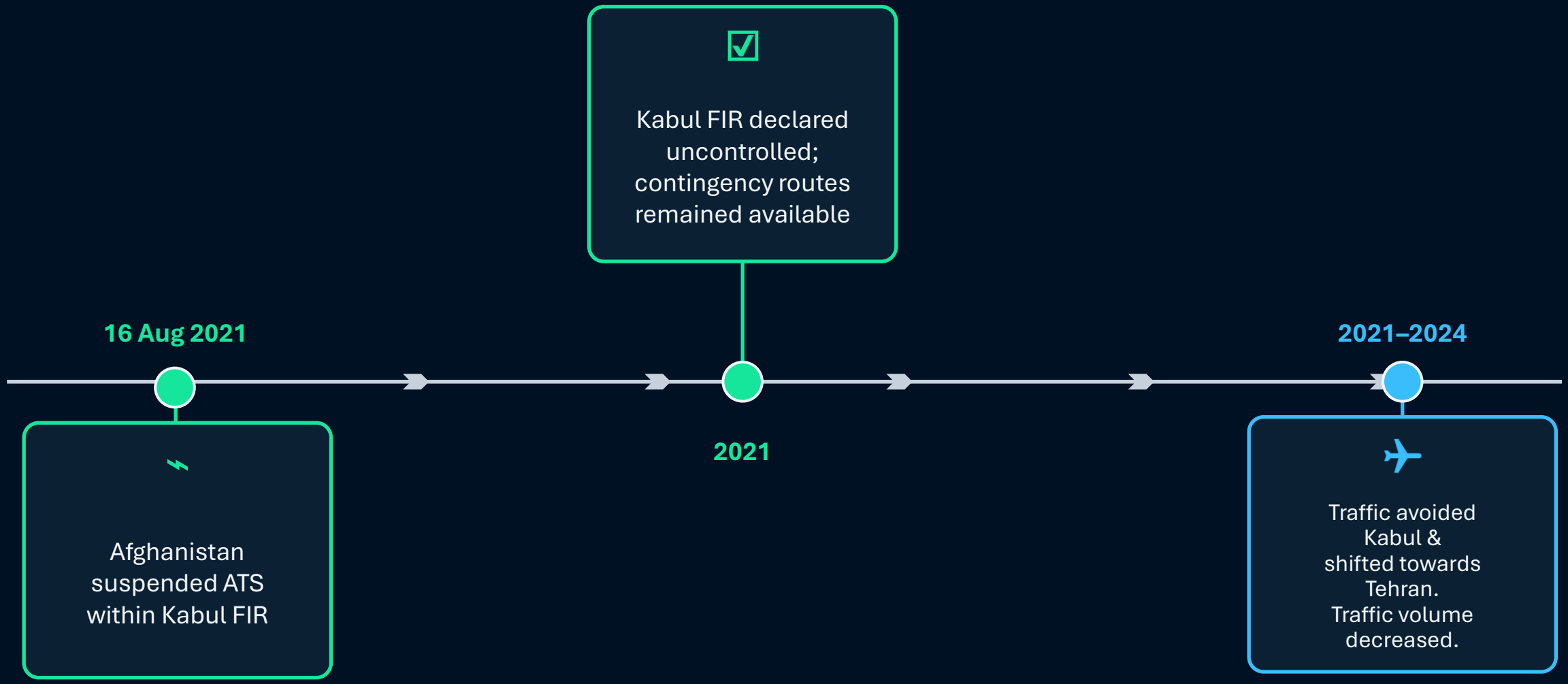
Vietnam Airlines

KLM

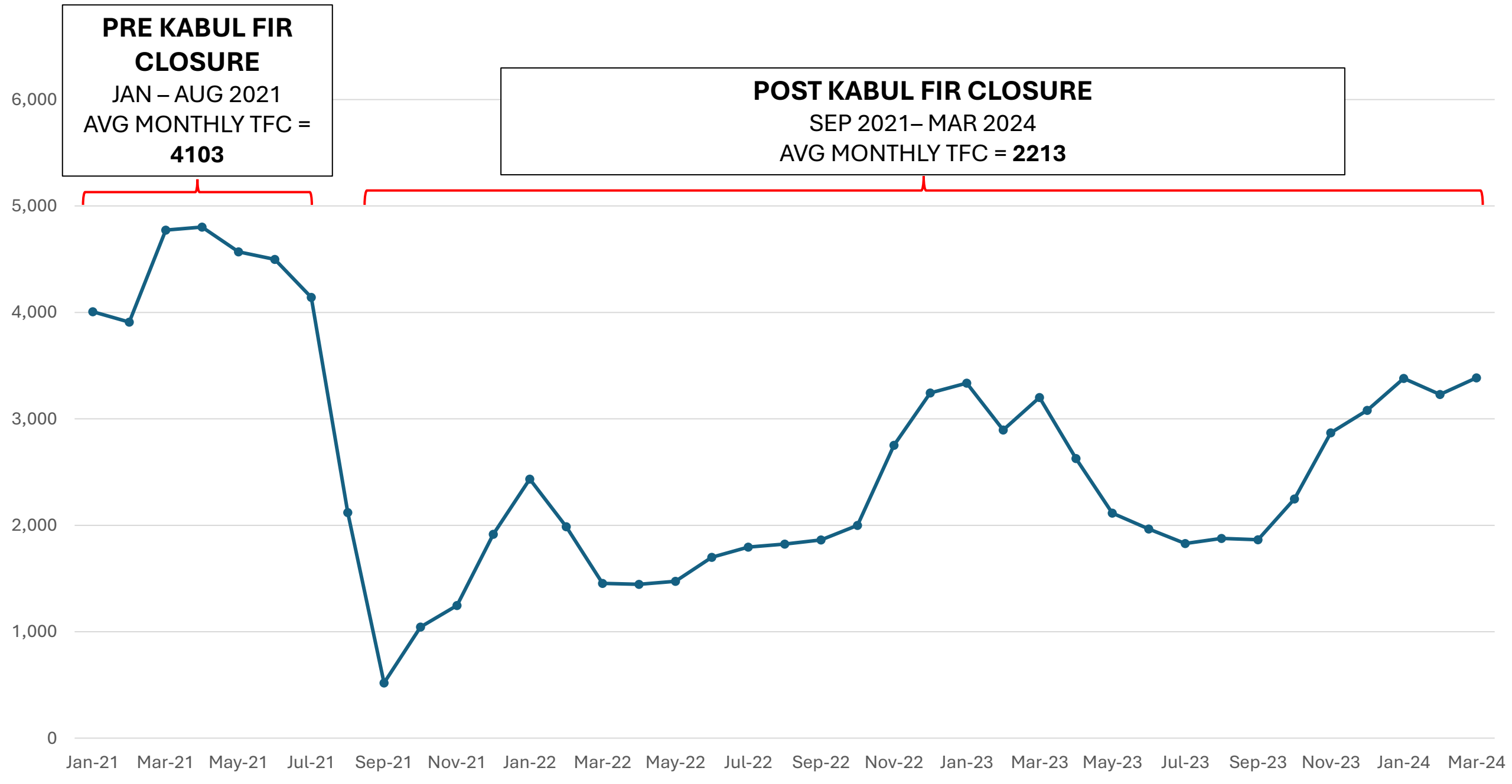
Royal Dutch Airlines

AIRFRANCE

TIMELINE OF EVENTS
2021 - 2024


16 Aug 2021
Afghanistan suspended ATS within Kabul FIR
2021
Kabul FIR declared uncontrolled; contingency routes remained available
2021–2024
Traffic avoided Kabul & shifted towards Tehran. Traffic volume decreased.

KABUL FIR TCP TRAFFIC



OVERVIEW OF
KABUL FIR CONTINGENCY PROCEDURES
FROM AUGUST 2021 TO AUGUST 2025

KABUL FIR ATM CONTINGENCY PLAN (UPPER AIRSPACE FL300 – FL510)

- As per Kabul FIR ATM Contingency Plan and relevant NOTAMs, the following routes are available for transit traffic:

  a) FIRUZ-P500-MOTMO (FL300-FL510)

  b) AMDAR-M875-TAPIS-L509-LAJAK(FL310-FL510)

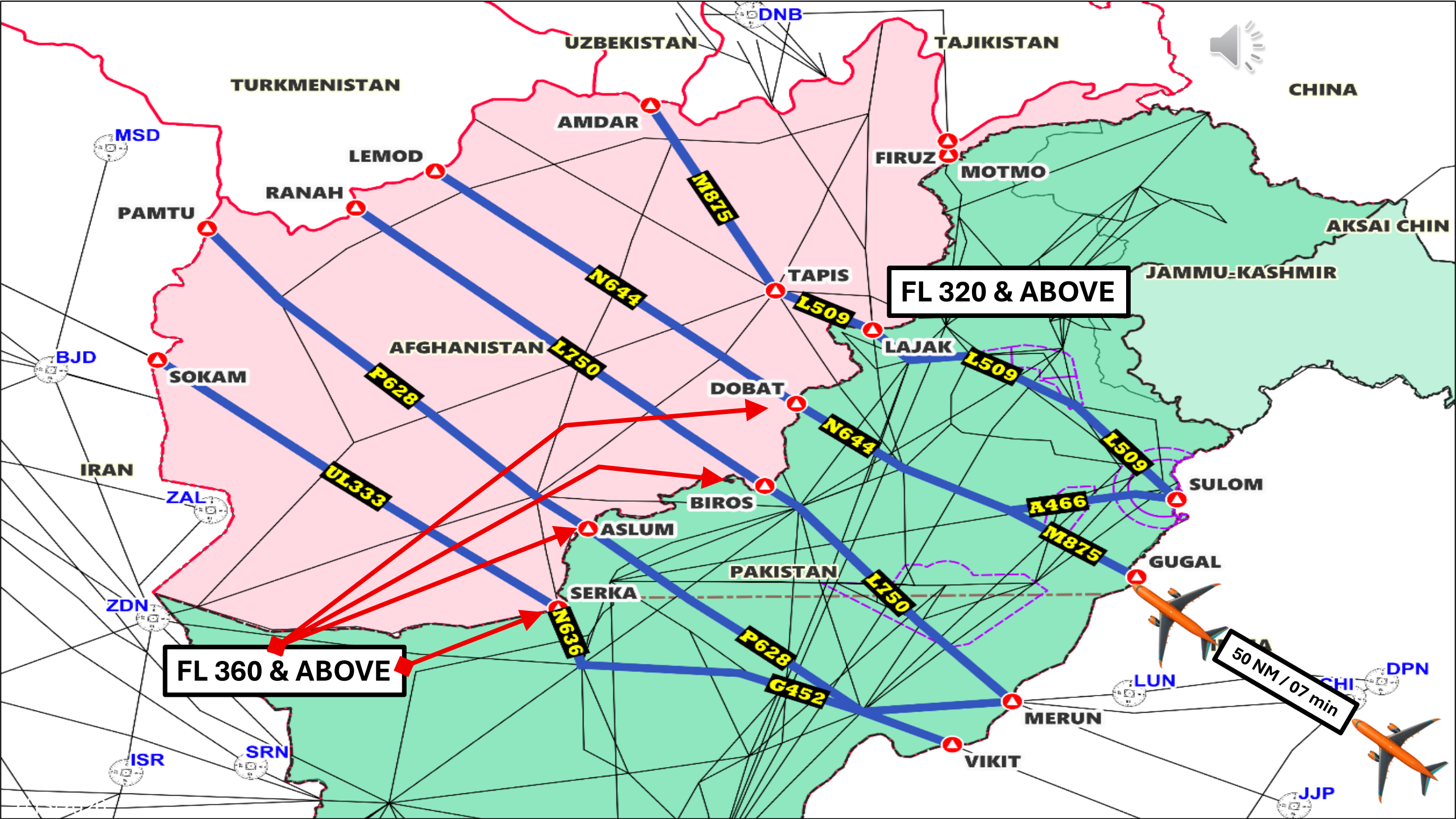
  c) LEMOD-N644-DOBAT ***(FL360-FL510)***

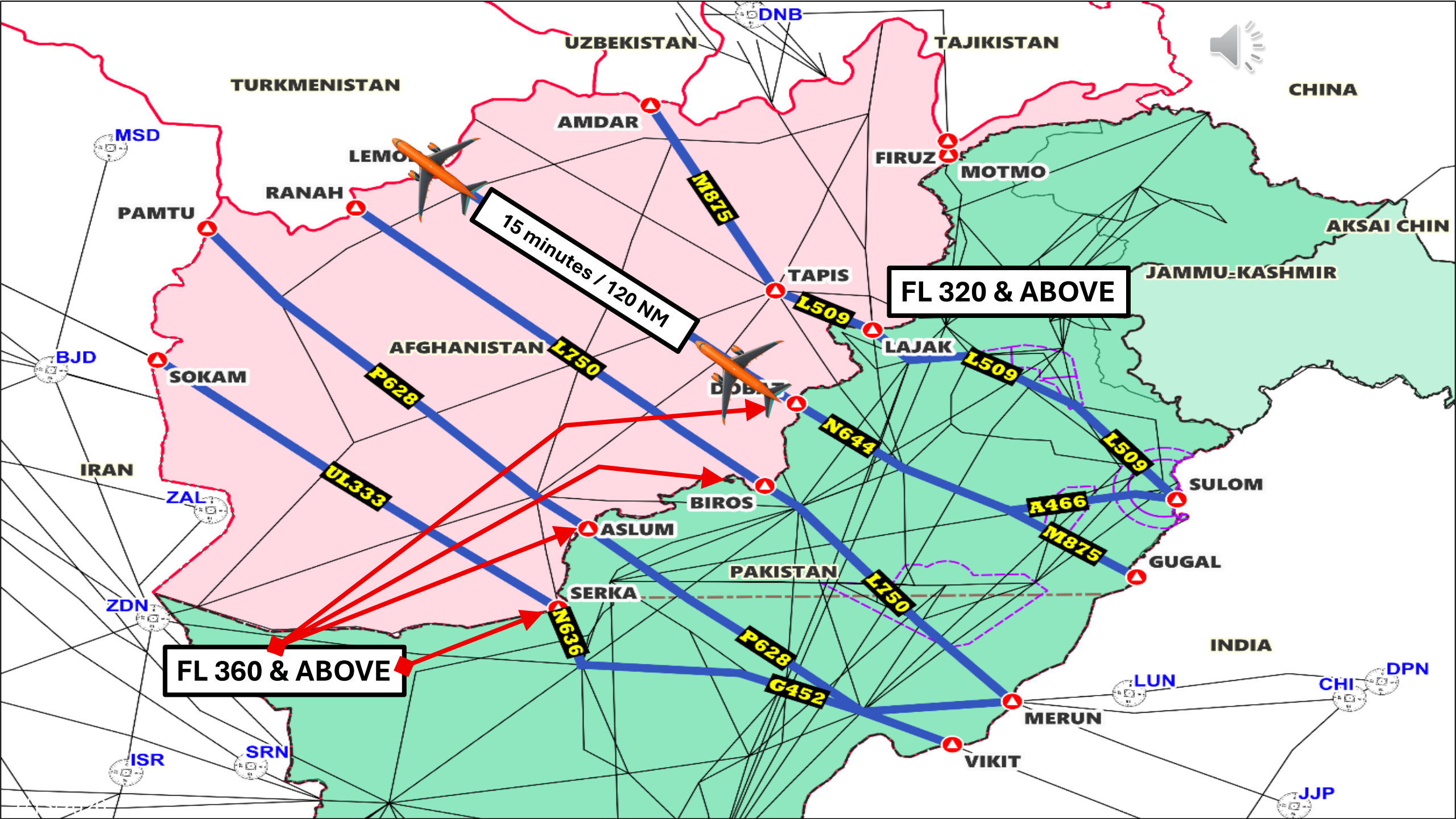
  d) RANAH-L750-BIROS ***(FL360-FL510)***

  e) PAMTU-P628-ASLUM ***(FL360-FL510)***

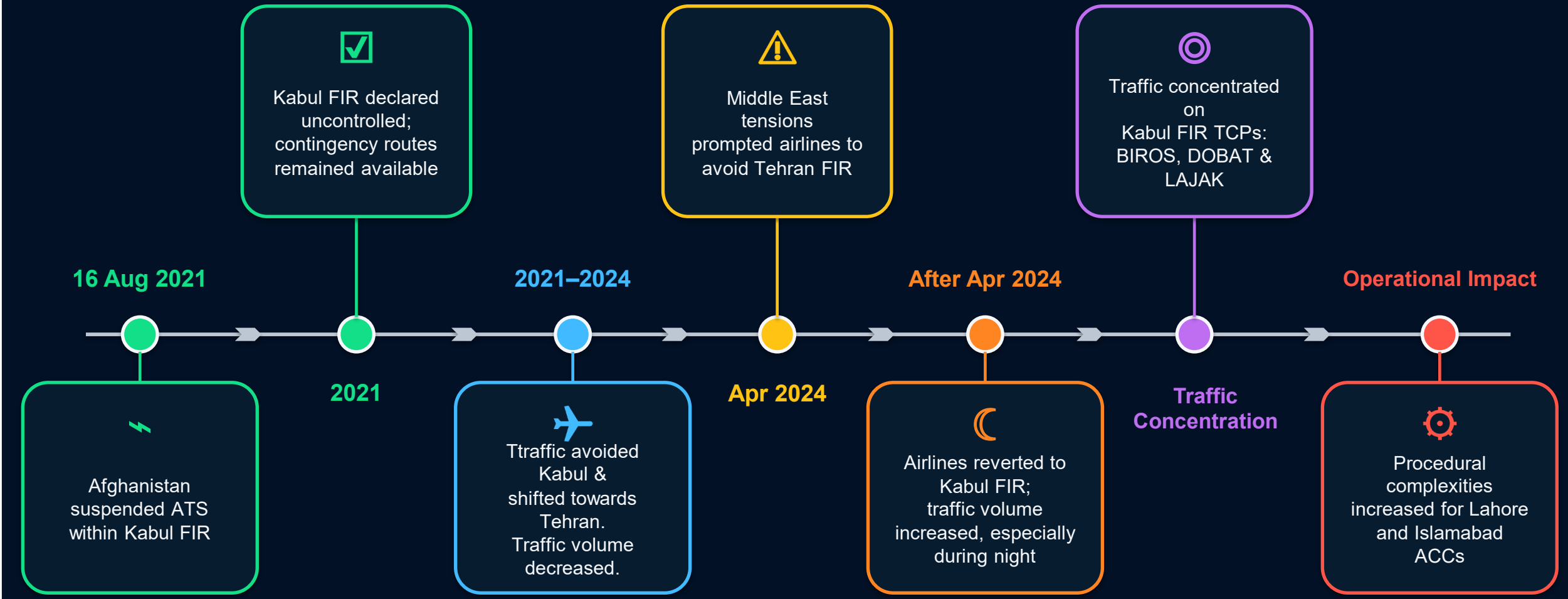
  f) SOKAM-UL333-SERKA ***(FL360-FL510)***

- Adjacent FIRs need to provide minimum in-trail intervals of ***15 minutes*** (constant or increasing) between flights per flight level per ATS route in the event of complete disruption of ATC within the Kabul FIR.


DNB
UZBEKISTAN
TAJIKISTAN
TURKMENISTAN
CHINA
MSD
AMDAR
LEMOD
RANAH
PAMTU
FIRUZ
MOTMO
AKSAI CHIN
M875
TAPIS
N644
L509
JAMMU-KASHMIR
FL 320 & ABOVE
LAJAK
AFGHANISTAN
L750
BJD
SOKAM
P628
DOBAT
L509
N644
IRAN
UL333
ZAL
BIROS
SULOM
A466
M875
ASLUM
GUGAL
PAKISTAN
SERKA
L750
ZDN
N636
P628
FL 360 & ABOVE
G452
LUN
DPN
50 NM / 07 min
MERUN
VIKIT
ISR
SRN
JJP


DNB
UZBEKISTAN
TAJIKISTAN
TURKMENISTAN
CHINA
MSD
AMDAR
M875
FIRUZ
MOTMO
LEMO
RANAH
PAMTU
15 minutes / 120 NM
AKSAI CHIN
TAPIS
FL 320 & ABOVE
JAMMU-KASHMIR
L509
LAJAK
AFGHANISTAN
L750
P628
L509
BJD
SOKAM
N644
L509
IRAN
UL333
SULOM
BIROS
A466
ZAL
ASLUM
M875
GUGAL
PAKISTAN
L750
SERKA
ZDN
N636
P628
INDIA
FL 360 & ABOVE
G452
LUN
CHI
DPN
MERUN
ISR
SRN
VIKIT
JJP

TIMELINE OF EVENTS
2024 - 2025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2021
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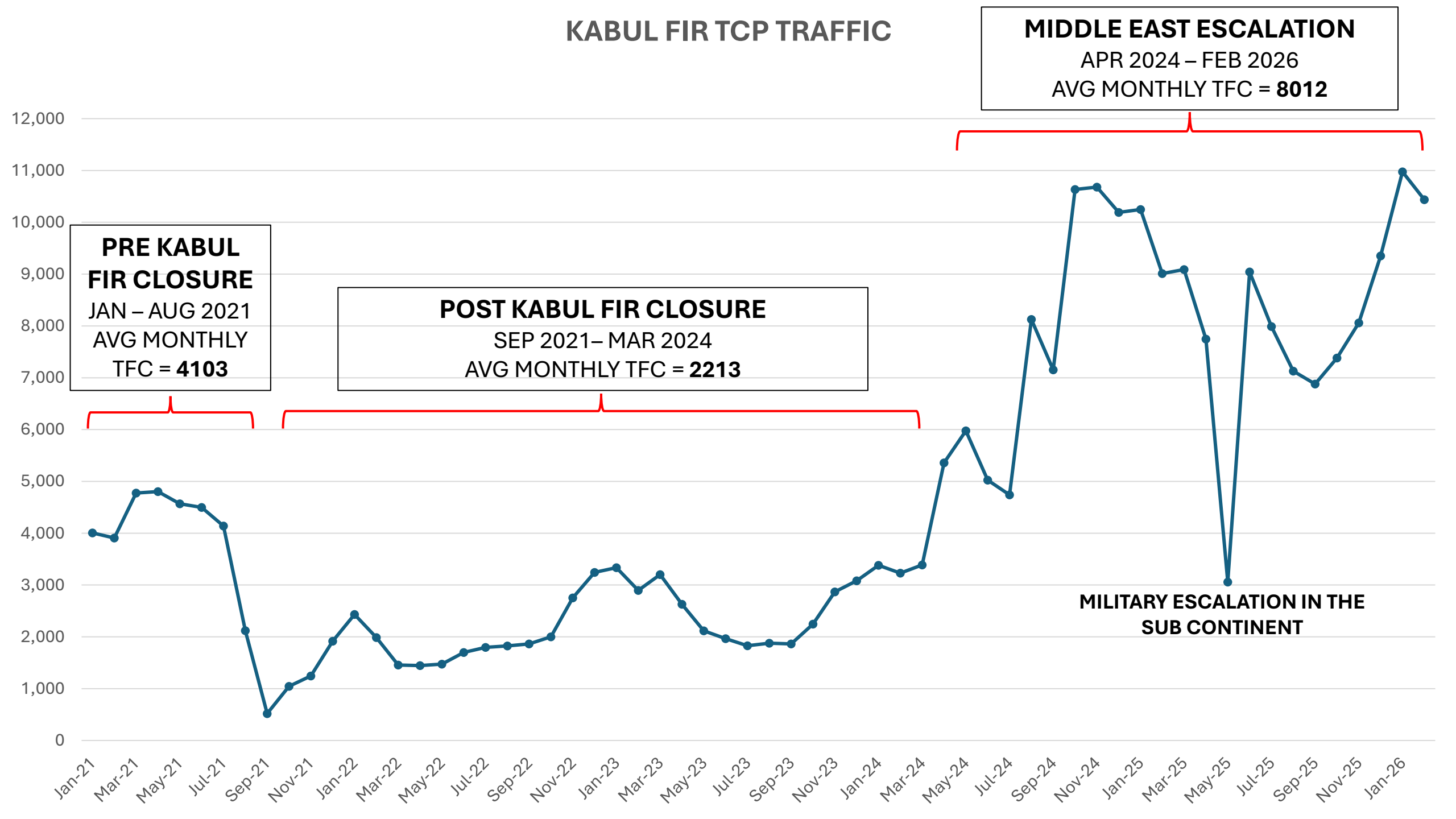
Apr 2024
Middle East tensions prompted airlines to avoid Tehran FIR
After Apr 2024
Airlines reverted to Kabul FIR; traffic volume increased, especially during night
Traffic Concentration
Traffic concentrated on Kabul FIR TCPs: BIROS, DOBAT & LAJAK
Operational Impact
Procedural complexities increased for Lahore and Islamabad ACCs


KABUL FIR TCP TRAFFIC
MIDDLE EAST ESCALATION
APR 2024 – FEB 2026
AVG MONTHLY TFC = 8012
PRE KABUL FIR CLOSURE
JAN – AUG 2021
AVG MONTHLY TFC = 4103
POST KABUL FIR CLOSURE
SEP 2021– MAR 2024
AVG MONTHLY TFC = 2213
MILITARY ESCALATION IN THE SUB CONTINENT
12,000
11,000
10,000
9,000
8,000
7,000
6,000
5,000
4,000
3,000
2,000
1,000
0
Jan-21
Mar-21
May-21
Jul-21
Sep-21
Nov-21
Jan-22
Mar-22
May-22
Jul-22
Sep-22
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Jan-24
Mar-24
May-24
Jul-24
Sep-24
Nov-24
Jan-25
Mar-25
May-25
Jul-25
Sep-25
Nov-25
Jan-26

IMPACT ON PAKISTANI ATC

- Changeover points with Delhi / Mumbai ACCs:
  - SULOM
  - MERUN
  - GUGAL
  - VIKIT
- As per LoA, westbound traffic is accepted by Lahore ACC at these changeover points with a longitudinal separation of 50 NM at same level.
- Traffic is accepted at FL300 & above. FL 280 is also available from 1700 UTC till 0100 UTC
- Once traffic is accepted by Lahore & Islamabad ACCs, Controllers have to ensure that all aircraft fulfill the Contingency procedures before entering Kabul FIR via LAJAK **(FL320 & Above)**, DOBAT **(FL360 & Above)**, BIROS **(FL360 & Above)**, ASLUM **(FL360 & Above)** OR SERKA **(FL360 & Above)** i.e. ***they have to be longitudinally separated by 15 minutes at same level and they also have to meet the applicable vertical restrictions.***
- In order to achieve this, controllers at Lahore & Islamabad ACC have to apply ***speed control, rerouting, vectoring or enroute holding***

IMPACT DUE TO CONTINGENCY

- Increased ATC Workload
- Flight Safety Hazards posed by holding aircraft
- Excessive flight delays
- Extra fuel consumption
- Increased carbon emissions
- Aircraft have to descend / climb to non-optimal Flight Levels

HOLDING & DELAY DATA

APRIL 2024 - AUGUST 2025			
CHANGEOVER POINT WITH KABUL	**DAILY FLIGHTS SUBJECTED TO HOLDING / DELAY**	**AVERAGE DELAY (IN MINUTES)**	**MINIMUM & MAXIMUM (IN MINUTES)**
LAJAK	**1 to 2**	**09**	**05 - 20**
DOBAT	**7 to 8**	**07**	**05 - 18**
BIROS	**3 to 4**	**09**	**05 - 22**
TOTAL 10 to 15 Flights were being subjected to excessive delays on daily basis			

INITIATIVES BY PAKISTAN IN COLLABORATION WITH ICAO AND NEIGHBORING STATES

2022

- Internal ATS Route adjustment was carried out to facilitate connectivity between Lahore FIR and Dushanbe FIR saving approximately 15 minutes of flying time for each flight.

March 2025

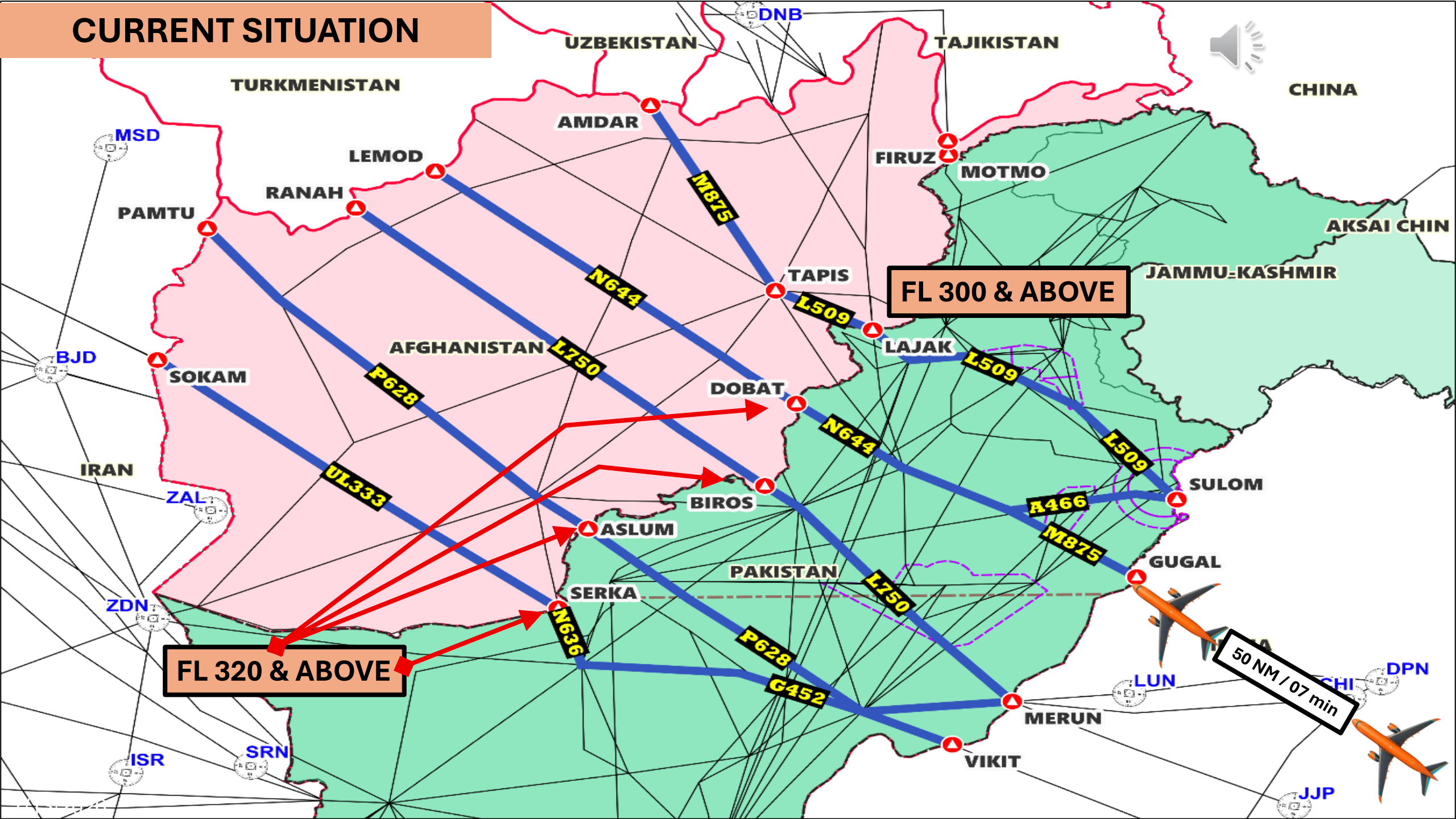
- Pakistan presented case during 4th Meeting of SAIOSEACG in March 2025 for availability of FL 320 & 340 over SERKA, ASLUM, BIROS & DOBAT as well as availability of FL 300 over LAJAK.
- Pakistan also proposed resumption of BOBCAT ATFM procedures on the basis of 15 min longitudinal spacing.

August 2025

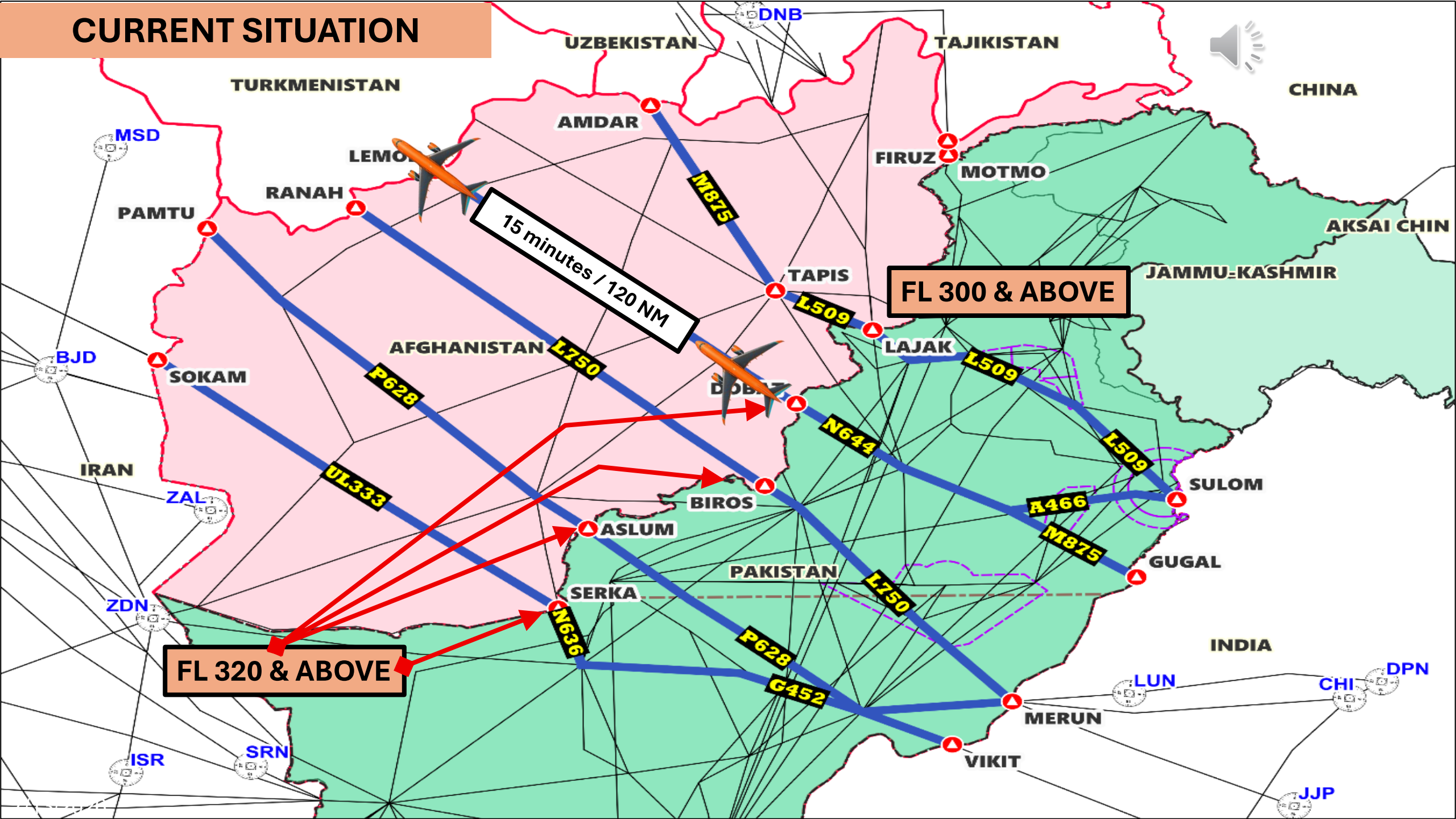
- With the cooperation of concerned States and support of ICAO APAC / ICAO EURO/NAT and IATA, the above lower levels became available over KABUL FIR TCPs in the month of August 2025.

September 2025

- With the efforts of AeroThai, BOBCAT ATFM was successfully resumed w.e.f. 04th September 2025.

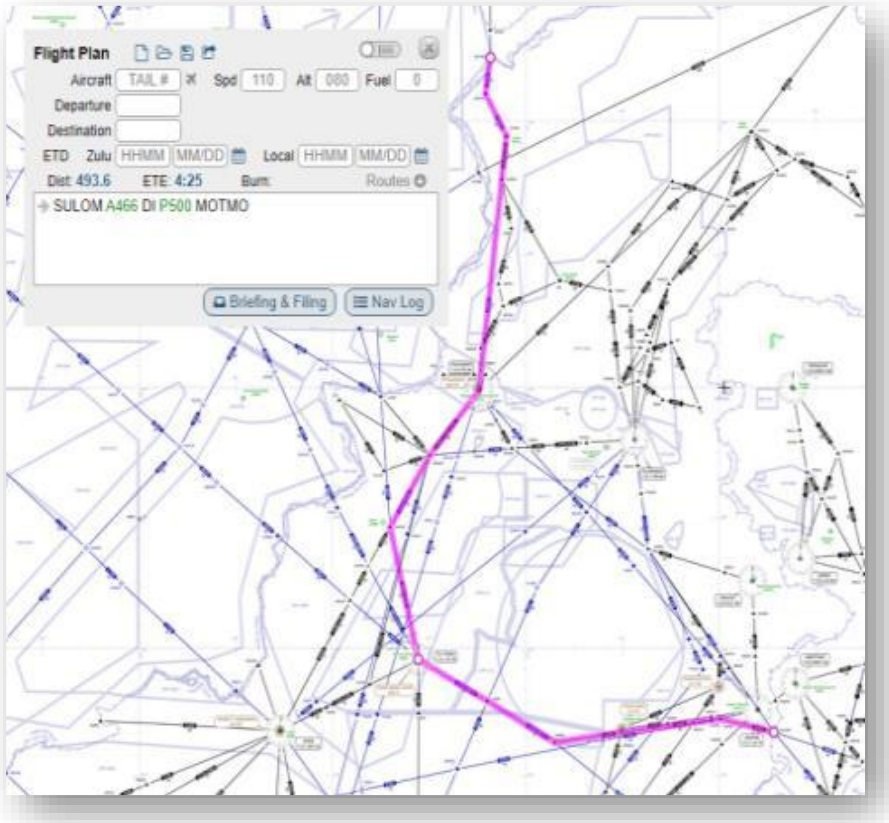

CURRENT SITUATION
UZBEKISTAN
TURKMENISTAN
TAJIKISTAN
CHINA
DNB
MSD
AMDAR
LEMOD
RANAH
PAMTU
FIRUZ
MOTMO
AKSAI CHIN
JAMMU-KASHMIR
TAPIS
M875
N644
L509
FL 300 & ABOVE
LAJAK
AFGHANISTAN
L750
P628
SOKAM
BJD
DOBAT
IRAN
UL333
ZAL
BIROS
SULOM
A466
ASLUM
GUGAL
PAKISTAN
SERKA
ZDN
N636
FL 320 & ABOVE
G452
LUN
DPN
MERUN
50 NM / 07 min
VIKIT
ISR
SRN
JJP

CURRENT SITUATION

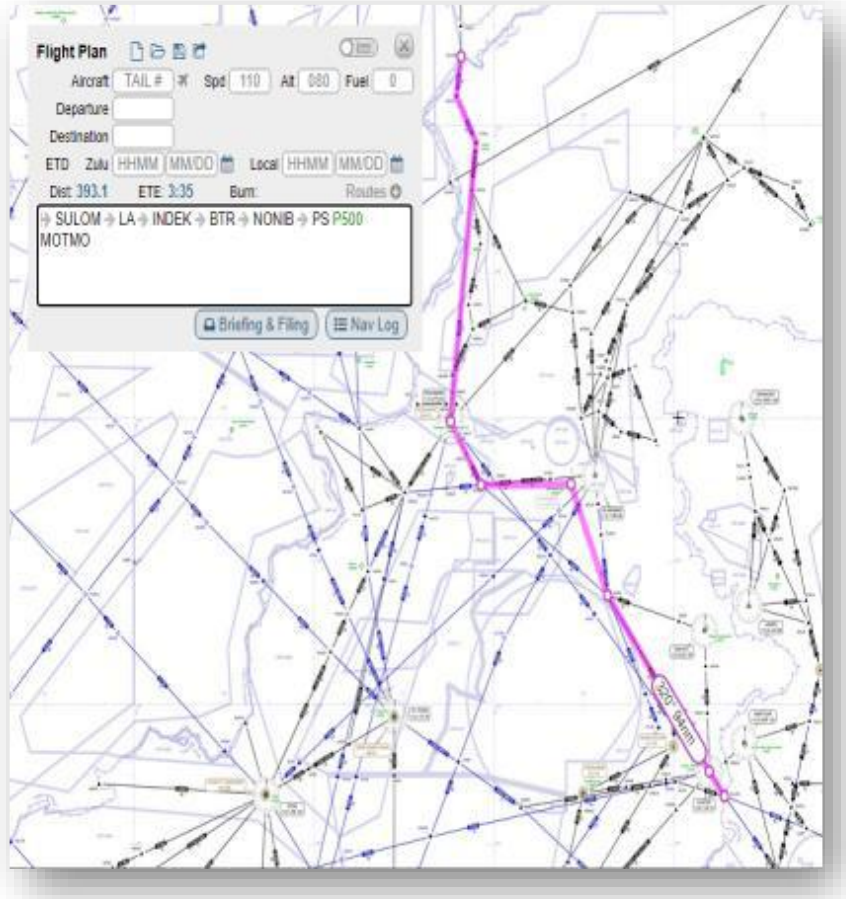


ATS ROUTE ADJUSTMENT- T400-P500- 2022

Internal ATS Route adjustment was carried out to facilitate connectivity between Lahore FIR and Dushanbe FIR saving approximately 15 minutes of flying time for each flight:



A466-P500



T400-P500

POST SEPTEMBER 2025 SITREP

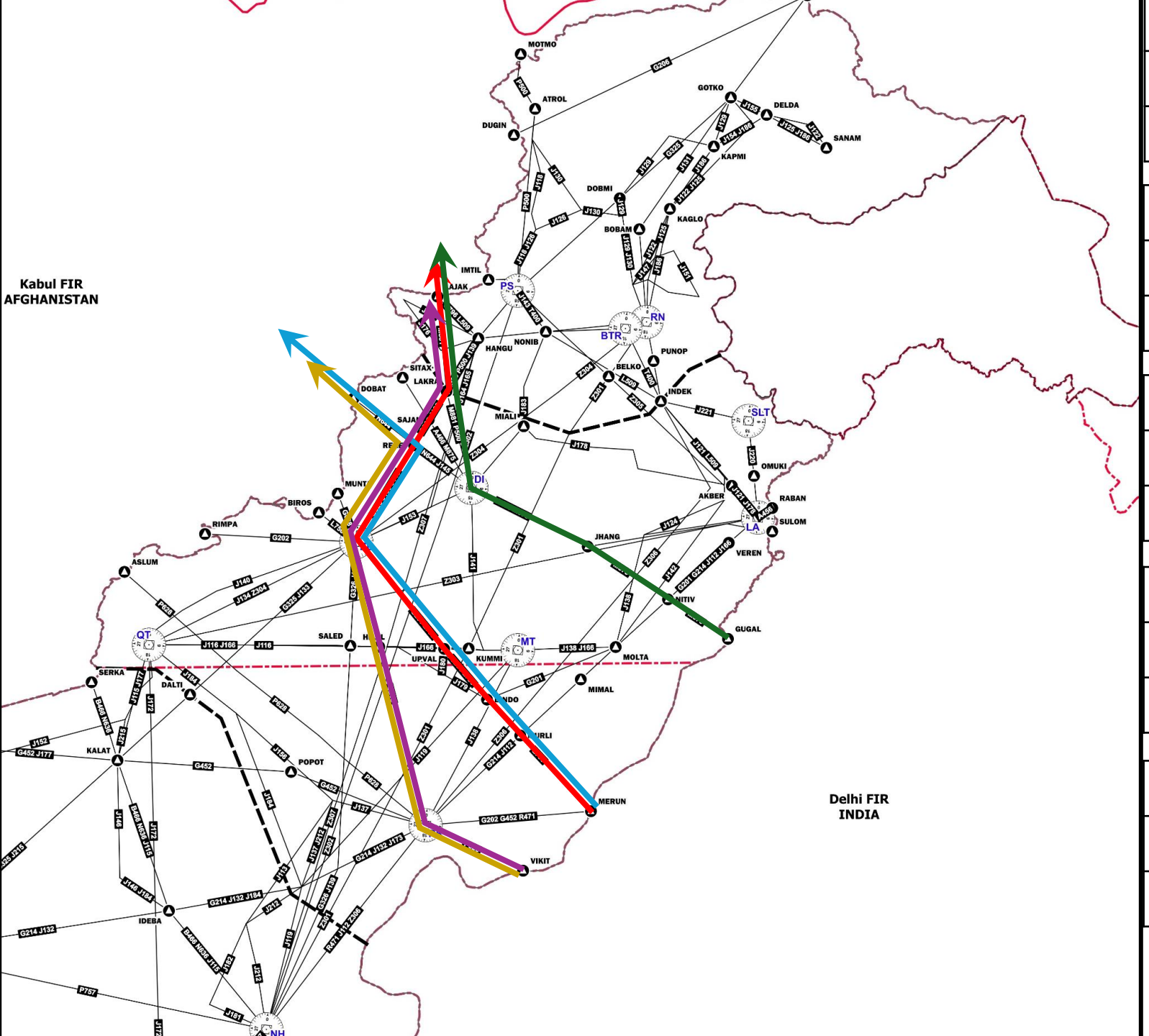
- Traffic volume through Afghanistan is consistently high throughout the day, especially during night time.
- The availability of additional levels over KABUL FIR TCPs and resumption of BOBCAT ATFM has considerably eased the situation.
- Majority of Westbound traffic (almost 80%) is utilizing BOBCAT ATFM for flight level allocation.
- ATC intervention, in the form of speed control, vectoring / holding, has significantly reduced, however, still a few flights have to face delays on a daily basis, due to the demanding Contingency requirements over KABUL FIR TCPs.

HOLDING & DELAY DATA

KABUL FIR TCP	DAILY FLIGHTS SUBJECTED TO HOLDING / DELAY		AVERAGE DELAY (IN MINUTES)		MINIMUM & MAXIMUM (IN MINUTES)	
	APR 24 TO AUG 25	SEP 25 TO FEB 26	APR 24 TO AUG 25	SEP 25 TO FEB 26	APR 24 TO AUG 25	SEP 25 TO FEB 26
LAJAK	1 to 2	0 to 1	09	03	05 - 20	03 - 05
DOBAT	7 to 8	2 to 3	07	04	05 - 18	03 – 06
BIROS	3 to 4	2 to 3	09	04	05 - 22	03 - 06

POST SEPTEMBER 2025 SITREP

- *One prominent issue that emerged was that many flights started to fly unconventional flight paths, based on their flight planning.*
- *These paths cross multiple routes and also involve flight level changes due to varying direction of flight.*
- *This is further explained in slide below*



GUGAL	***WB***	JHANG
JHANG	***WB***	DI
DI	***WB***	LAJAK

MERUN	***WB***	ZB
ZB	***EB***	REGET
REGET	***WB***	DOBAT

MERUN	***WB***	ZB
ZB	***EB***	LAKRA
LAKRA	***WB***	LAJAK

VIKIT	***WB***	ZB
ZB	***EB***	LAKRA
LAKRA	***WB***	LAJAK

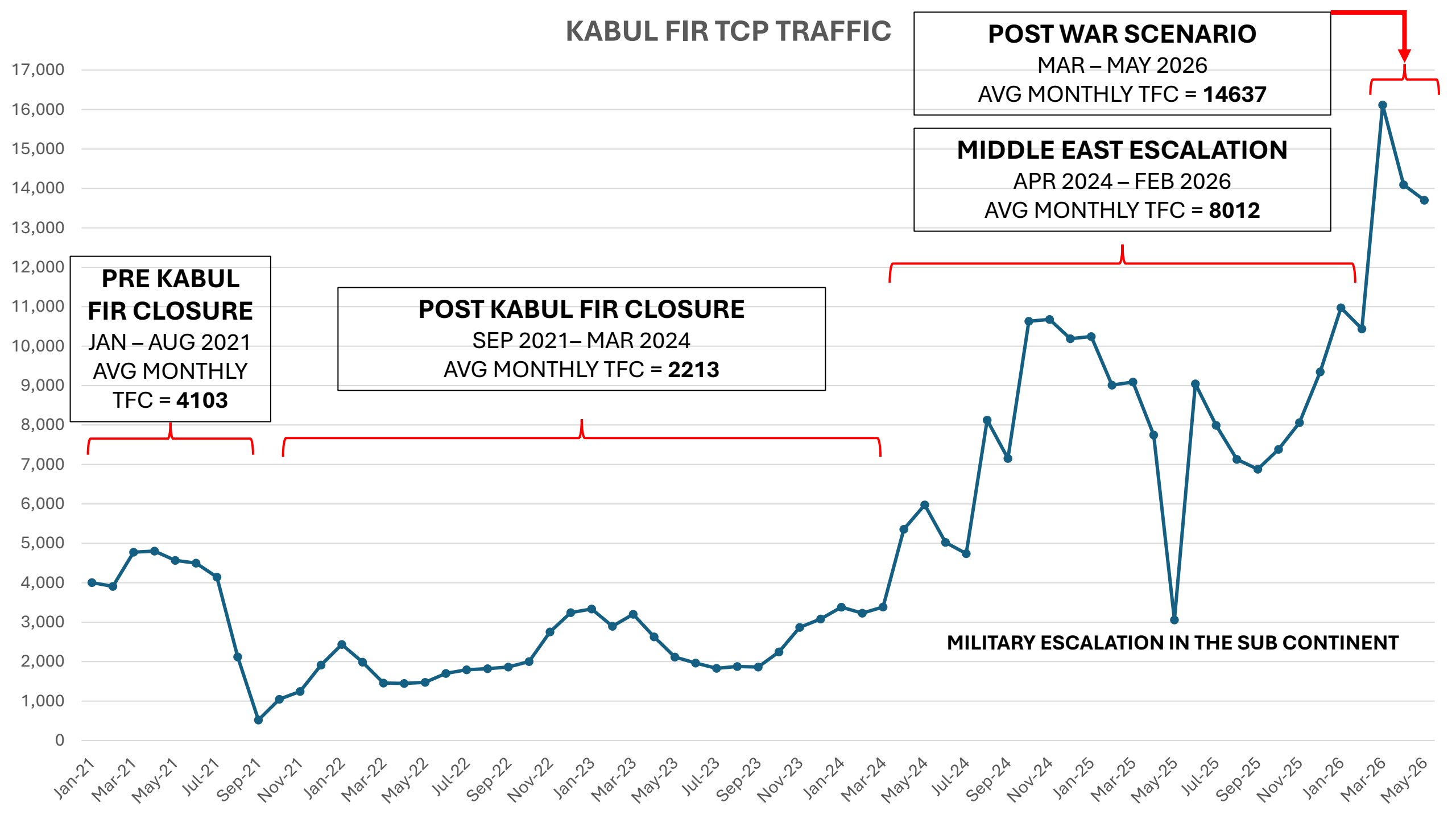
VIKIT	***WB***	ZB
ZB	***EB***	REGET
LAKRA	***WB***	DOBAT

UNIDIRECTIONAL WESTBOUND TRAFFIC IS DEPICTED HERE FOR UNDERSTANDING HOWEVER THIS ISSUE IS FACED IN CASE OF EASTBOUND TRAFFIC AS WELL

FLIGHT LEVEL CHANGES DUE TO VARYING DIRECTION OF FLIGHT AND INCREASED ATC WORKLOAD

- Flights cross multiple busy routes leading to conflictions
- The route G325 is a major trunk route with high volume traffic flowing from North to South & vice versa.
- Controllers have to be very vigilant and active in ensuring timely level changes of subject Westbound flights (defined above), because in case level changes are delayed or overlooked, these flights become reciprocal with traffic operating on G325 at same level.

MIDDLE EAST ESCALATION
(TIMELINE OF EVENTS)
FEB 2026 ONWARDS


KABUL FIR TCP TRAFFIC
POST WAR SCENARIO
MAR – MAY 2026
AVG MONTHLY TFC = 14637
MIDDLE EAST ESCALATION
APR 2024 – FEB 2026
AVG MONTHLY TFC = 8012
PRE KABUL FIR CLOSURE
JAN – AUG 2021
AVG MONTHLY TFC = 4103
POST KABUL FIR CLOSURE
SEP 2021– MAR 2024
AVG MONTHLY TFC = 2213
MILITARY ESCALATION IN THE SUB CONTINENT
17,000
16,000
15,000
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Mar-25
May-25
Jul-25
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Nov-25
Jan-26
Mar-26
May-26

Feb 2026

- Iran War started on 28th Feb, 2026.
- Largely all Airports and FIRs across the Middle East closed down in the early phase of the war.

Early to Mid March 2026

- Limited flight operation resumed consisting of mostly repatriation flights.

April 2026

- Phased reopening of Airspaces began.
- Flight Operation gradually resumed.

Current Status (June 2026)

- Flight operation has largely been restored but at reduced capacity.
- Many Airlines are still not able to fully restore pre-war schedules.

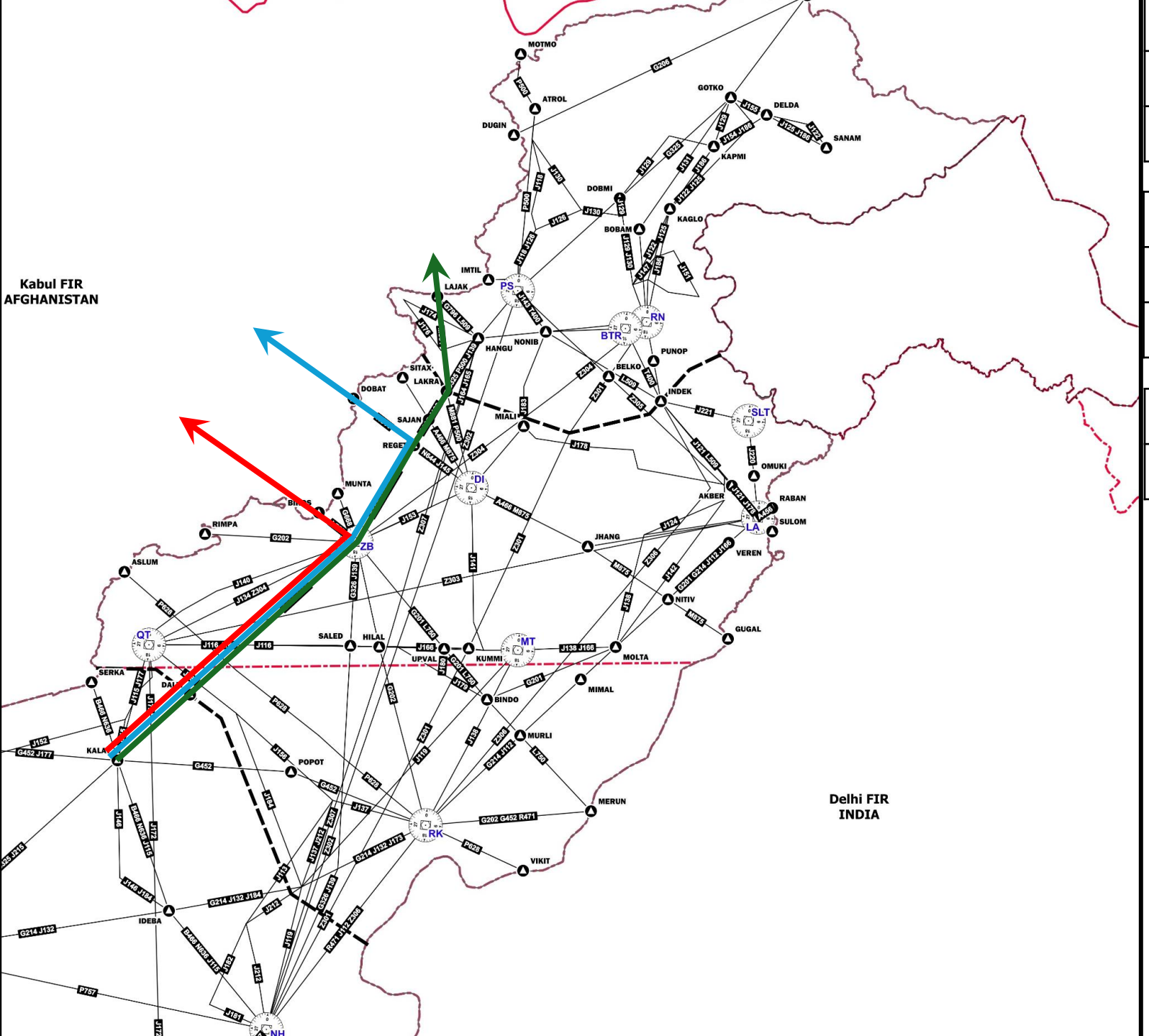
CURRENT SITREP

a) Transits that utilized Muscat FIR and oceanic airspace through the Middle East have also rerouted via Afghanistan

b) Departures from Gulf states towards Europe, Central Asia etc that previously utilized Tehran FIR were now utilizing Pakistan Airspace from the South and exit via Afghanistan or Tajikistan.

- These flights do not participate in BOBCAT ATFM and have to be adjusted tactically.
- Said flights cross all the major Westbound routes leading to traffic conflictions.
- Level changes are involved due to varying direction of flight along their respective route i.e. EASTBOUND to WESTBOUND and vice versa.

c) The issue explained earlier regarding flights following unconventional flight paths through Pakistan Airspace still persists, with similar ramifications as outlined above.



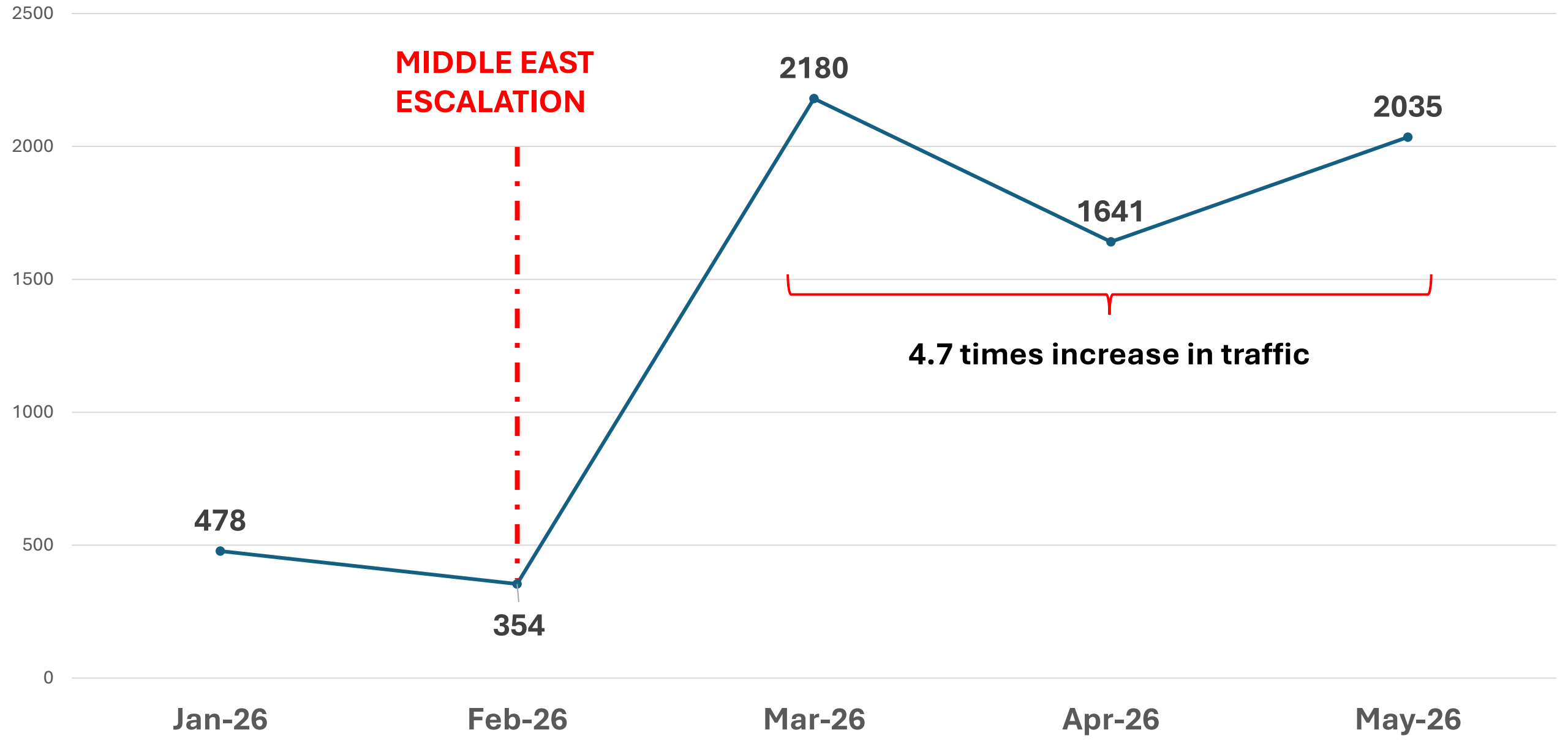
DALTI	***EB***	ZB
ZB	***EB***	LAKRA
LAKRA	***WB***	LAJAK

DALTI	***EB***	ZB
ZB	***EB***	REGET
REGET	***WB***	DOBAT

DALTI	***EB***	ZB
ZB	***WB***	BIROS

UNIDIRECTIONAL TRAFFIC (SOUTH TO NORTH) IS DEPICTED HERE FOR UNDERSTANDING HOWEVER THIS ISSUE IS FACED IN CASE OF OPPOSITE DIRECTION TRAFFIC AS WELL

Middle East Arrivals & Departures using Afghanistan Airspace to connect with Europe & Central Asia



HOLDING & DELAY DATA

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LAJAK	1 to 2	0 to 1	2 to 3	09	03	08	05 - 20	03 - 05	03 - 15
DOBAT	7 to 8	2 to 3	5 to 6	07	04	05	05 - 18	03 – 06	03 - 10
BIROS	3 to 4	2 to 3	5 to 10	09	04	05	05 - 22	03 - 06	03 - 08

TACTICAL MEASURES BY PAKISTAN ATC

TACTICAL MEASURES

1. COORDINATION AMONGST AFFECTED STATES:

   a) Coordination with Turkmenistan for transmission of estimate messages directly in ATM system for Eastbound traffic. Pakistan agreed to do the same for WESTBOUND traffic.

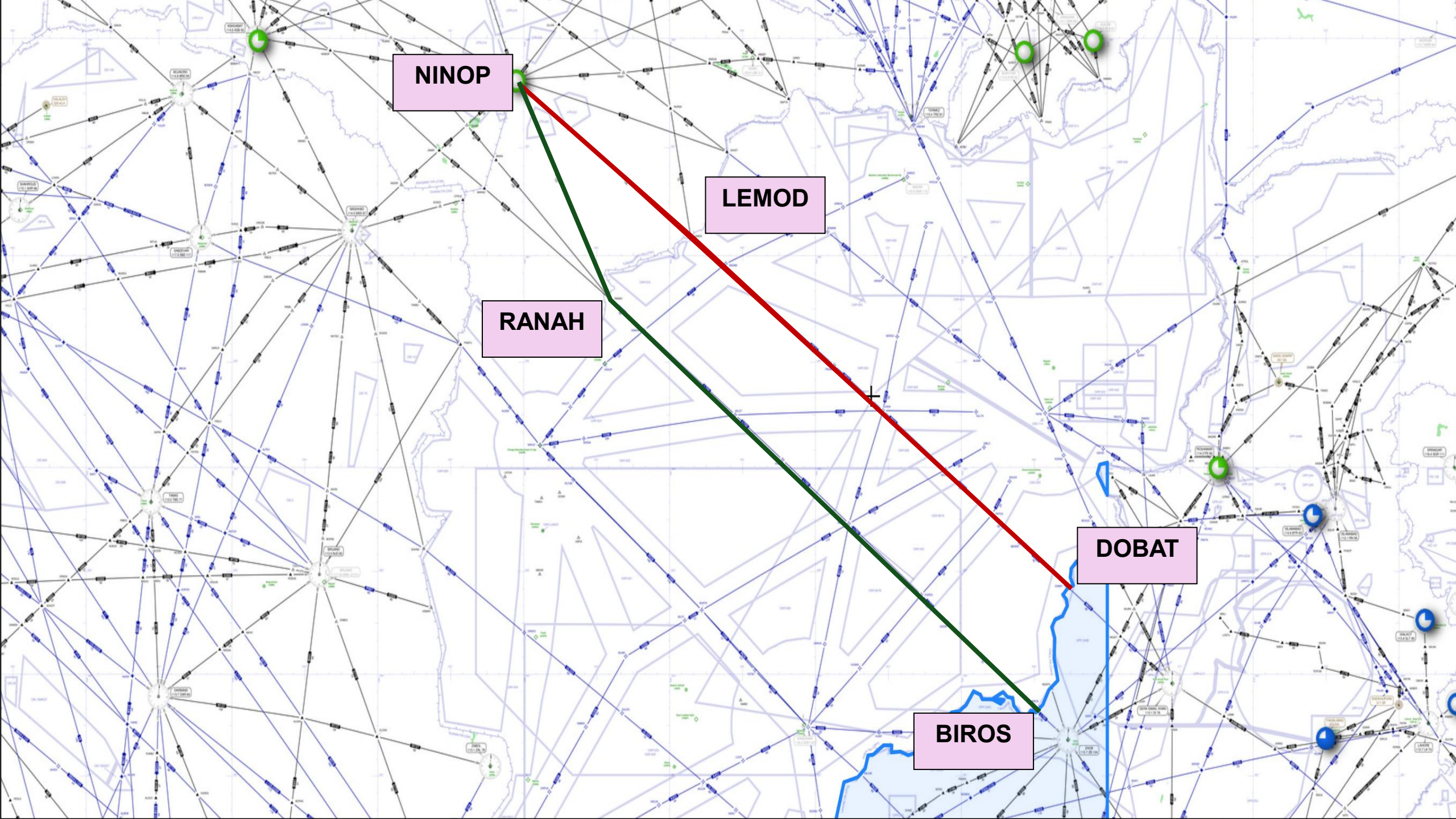
   b) Considerable difference between the transmitted and actual estimates was observed in some cases. It later came to light that the revision was a result of difference in UPPER WINDS fed in the system.

   c) Regular update of UPPER WINDS in ATM System was ensured, which has consequently improved the accuracy of estimates being relayed.

TACTICAL MEASURES

2. Dedicated screens were installed in ACCs displaying FlightRadar24 data to check progress of traffic, beyond normal surveillance coverage and better situational awareness ONLY.

3. REROUTING OPTION: In case of excessive delay, WESTBOUND flights are offered rerouting option. Rerouting is planned in such a way that flights can regain original routing in Turkmenabat FIR. Similar rerouting is also being practiced by Turkmenabat ACC. See Fig on next Slide


NINOP
LEMOD
RANAH
DOBAT
BIROS

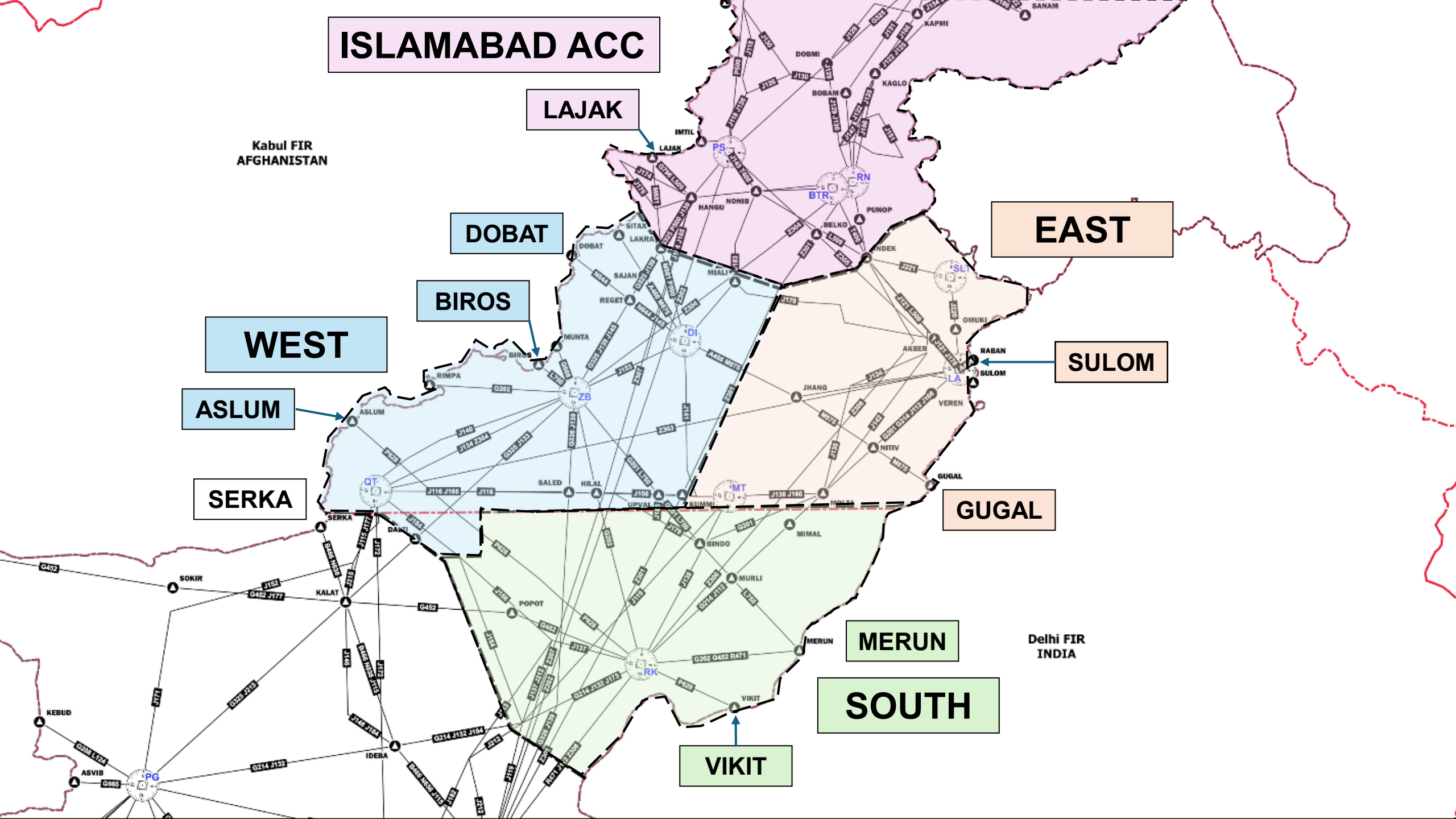
TACTICAL MEASURES

4. Westbound traffic is concentrated over 3 TCPs (LAJAK, DOBAT & BIROS). ACC Islamabad deals with TCP LAJAK and Lahore ACC Sector West deals with TCPs DOBAT & BIROS.

5. It is endeavoured to the maximum extent possible to carry out the planning and resolution of all traffic conflictions by the feeder sectors i.e. Lahore ACC East & South, especially during the night time hours where traffic volume is high.

6. This is important as all the WESTBOUND traffic converges in Sector West leading to high traffic congestion.

7. The changeover between internal sectors / units is also fluidly managed, allowing sectors the flexibility of early / delayed handover of traffic to ease the traffic load, as required.


ISLAMABAD ACC
LAJAK
Kabul FIR
AFGHANISTAN
DOBAT
BIROS
WEST
ASLUM
SERKA
EAST
SULOM
GUGAL
MERUN
SOUTH
VIKIT
Delhi FIR
INDIA
IMTIL
LAJAK
PS
BTR
RN
HANGU
NONIB
DOBMI
BOBAM
KAGLO
KAPMI
SANAM
PUNOP
BELKO
INDEK
SITAX
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DAIRI
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OMUKI
AKBER
RABAN
SULOM
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JHANG
VEREN
NITIV
GUGAL
MT
KUMMI
MOLTA
BINDO
MIMAL
MURLI
POPOT
MERUN
RK
VIKIT
KEBUD
ASVIB
PG
IDEBA

TACTICAL MEASURES

8. The following measures are implemented, as and when required, in order to manage the traffic following unconventional routes / flight paths:

   a) Direct Track: Traffic is given direct so that they fly offset to the normal route. In this way traffic is protected from imminent danger, even if there is conflicting reciprocal traffic at same level

   b) Proactive planning is ensured to highlight conflictions well in advance, as limited airspace is available.

FUTURE MEASURES

1. Further coordination is in progress with the support of ICAO APAC Office for reduction of 15 minutes longitudinal spacing over KABUL FIR TCPs to 10 minutes using Mach number technique as per Asia/Pacific Region ATM Contingency Plan

2. Moreover, coordination is also in progress for availability of FL 300 over KABUL FIR TCPs (SERKA, ASLUM, BIROS & DOBAT).

KEY TAKE AWAYS & LESSONS LEARNED

KEY TAKE AWAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- Pakistan procured its ATM System back in 2011. At that time the need for additional future sectors was not given due consideration. Equipment for only one additional sector at Lahore & Karachi ACCs, respectively, was procured.

- With the passage of time and subsequent airspace restructuring the vacant consoles were also assigned to newly established sectors, leaving behind zero vacant positions.

- Once the traffic began to rise exponentially during recent months the need was felt to vertically bifurcate particular ACC sectors, however, no working position was available for this purpose.

- Therefore, considering that procurement of ATM Systems are long term investments, States should give due thought and consideration for long term future requirements.

KEY TAKE AWAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- Active participation of states in Contingency Coordination Team (CCT) meetings, is of paramount importance for harmonized approach in regional contingency handling

- ANSPs should seek to proactively promote coordination amongst affected States to enable a collaborative approach towards dealing with Contingency events

- ANSPs should always be on the look out for innovative solutions e.g. use of Flight Radar24, Direct Tracking, use of non-semicircular levels (in dire circumstances only) etc

- Timely and transparent information sharing among relevant stakeholders, particularly airspace users, is essential for proactive operational planning;

- Sudden change in traffic flow and pattern may give rise to new confliction in airspace concerned which requires higher alertness and situational awareness of controllers. ATM tools and Supervisory support can be key mitigating factors

KEY TAKE AWAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- Close institutional collaboration and regular joint discussions among Civil Aviation Authorities (CAAs), Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs), and military authorities serve as key enablers for managing both foreseeable and unpredictable contingency events

- Strong professional commitment, adaptability, and teamwork from operational personnel—most notably air traffic controllers—are essential elements in handling contingencies;

- Conducting safety risk assessments for airspace initiatives carried out in case of contingency handling and continuously monitoring safety data are critical steps to maintain safety standards.

- Expeditious process for issuance of non-schedule flight clearance facilitates the entry of unexpected flights due to some enroute airspace closure

KEY TAKE AWAYS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- To manage additional traffic, airspace capacity enhancement initiatives should be explored (such as airspace route re-structuring, reduction in TOC separation, availability of additional flight levels etc.)

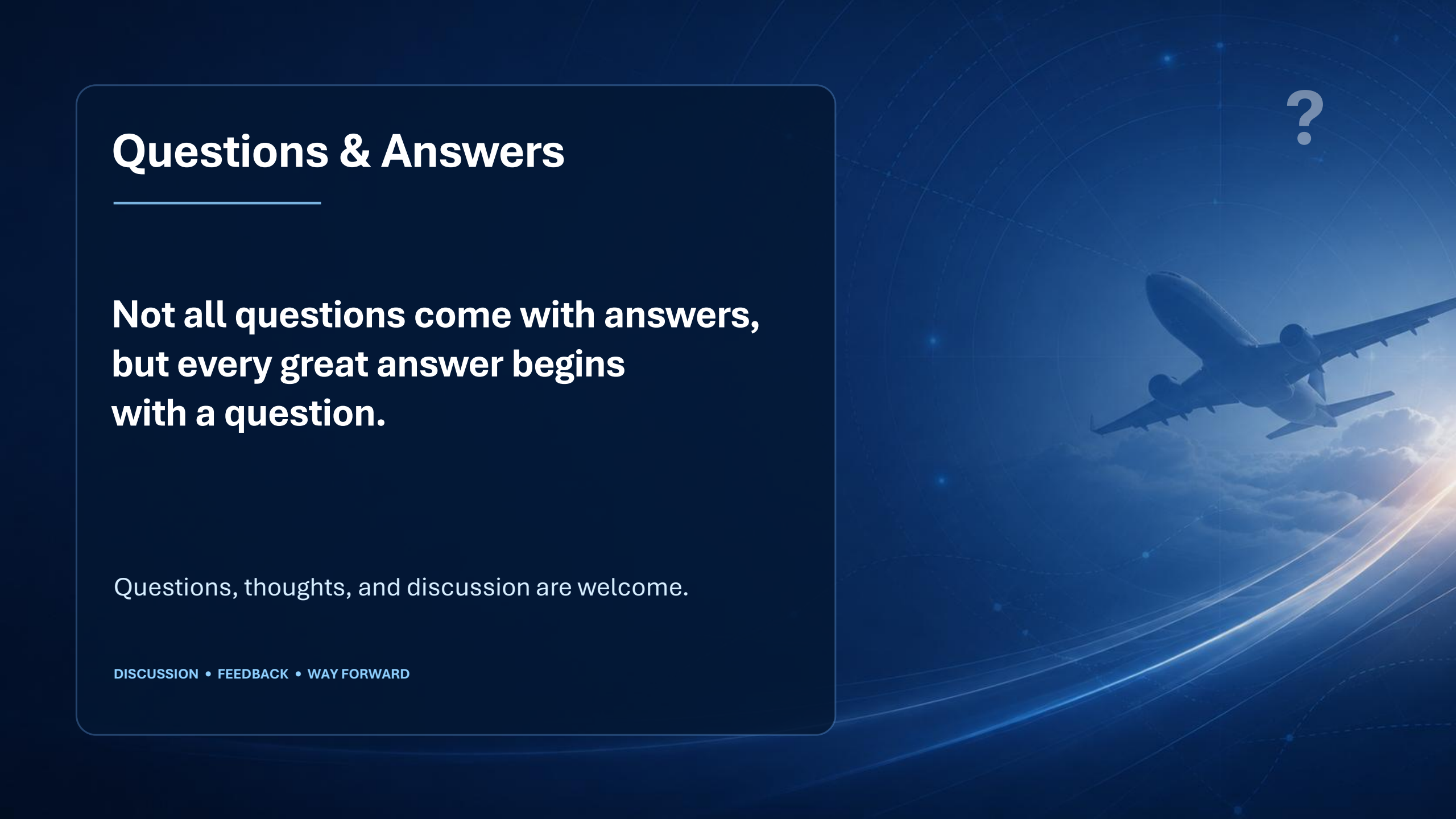
- States may revisit their respective ATM Contingency Plans to bring them in line with the Asia/Pacific Region ATM Contingency Plan, to allow effective practical implementation in case of activation (God forbid). Level allocation on Contingency routes should take into consideration commercial flight operation and aircraft performance.

Questions & Answers

Not all questions come with answers, but every great answer begins with a question.

Questions, thoughts, and discussion are welcome.

DISCUSSION • FEEDBACK • WAY FORWARD



THANK YOU