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## Election year to help Princely Jets post first profits

Company plans to double the size of its fleet every three years.

By Saad Hasan

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**KARACHI: Princely Jets – Pakistan’s only chartered air services provider – will record its first profit in fiscal 2012-13 since beginning operations in 2005, a top company official revealed.**

“The business has a long gestation period, but we are out of it now,” said Ghouse Akbar, the 46-year-old CEO of Princely Jets. “It did take us a while longer to make it profitable than we thought it would,” he remarked.

The privately-held firm, which is part of the Akbar Group, does not disclose its financial statements; but it confirmed that it has had a particularly good year so far.

Operating with a fleet of three jets and five helicopters, the company has flown to cities in rural Pakistan and as far as Europe.

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### PTI Chairman Khan flew to 69 cities, while PM Nawaz Sharif was in the air for 170 hours in one of the jets during the recent election campaigns

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Imran Khan, chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), flew to 69 cities during his recent election campaign on the company’s jets. Similarly, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was in the air for 170 hours in one of the jets as he mobilised crowds in 50 cities. Even the MQM used the company’s aircraft.

But Akbar insisted that this year’s profit does not entirely accrue from the increased business during the election campaigns. “We have simply recovered the cost of our investments over the years,” he explained.

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” I see growth coming. Businessmen need to travel, and they don’t have many options with all the delayed flights these days  
 Princely Jets CEO Ghouse Akbar

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Despite a sluggish economy, some industries in Pakistan have prospered over the last two decades; and this is most evident from a change in travelling patterns. “The head of a cement manufacturing concern uses our aircraft to visit a plant located outside Lahore. By road it takes him seven hours to get there; we take him there in one.”

“I see growth coming. Businessmen need to travel, and they don’t have many options with all the delayed flights these days,” Akbar said.

He said the company plans to expand its fleet to 15 by 2016. “The idea is to double it every three years.”

**Competing internationally**

Princely Jets has expanded to other countries, serving business tycoons and crown princes alike.

“To give you an example from our schedule during the past week, we operated in Sudan, Kuwait, France and the UK,” said Akbar. “European royalty and Saudi monarchs are our clients as well.”

But why would royalty prefer Princely over larger jet service providers? The answer: Pakistani pilots enjoy a particularly good reputation in the Middle East. “We also try to keep our service standards really high,” Akbar explained.

### More services

With high-rise buildings popping up all over the country, most without appropriate fire safety protection, Princely Jets has decided to equip one of its helicopters with equipment that can help douse fires with high-pressure water or chemicals at places where rescuers cannot reach immediately.

The decision has been a long time coming: industry experts say that helicopters should not be limited to flying passengers or carrying patients in case of emergencies only. However, successive attempts by businesses to seek permission to use helicopters for emergency purposes have been denied by the government.

A few years ago, as private news channels opened up offices one after the other, at least two major media groups had approached the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to see if they could use helicopters to cover Karachi.

“They were denied because of security concerns expressed by military authorities, who have cantonments and other installations in or near the city to worry about,” a senior CAA official explained.

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