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DXB traffic soars past pre-Covid figure

DUBAI

BY DHANUSHA GOKULAN
Chief Reporter

Dubai International Airport handled 87 million visits in 2023, beating the pre-Covid 2019 figure of 86.4 million, new data showed. The numbers also point to a significant uptick in fourth quarter traffic at the airport, helped by the COP28 event and the year-end festivities.

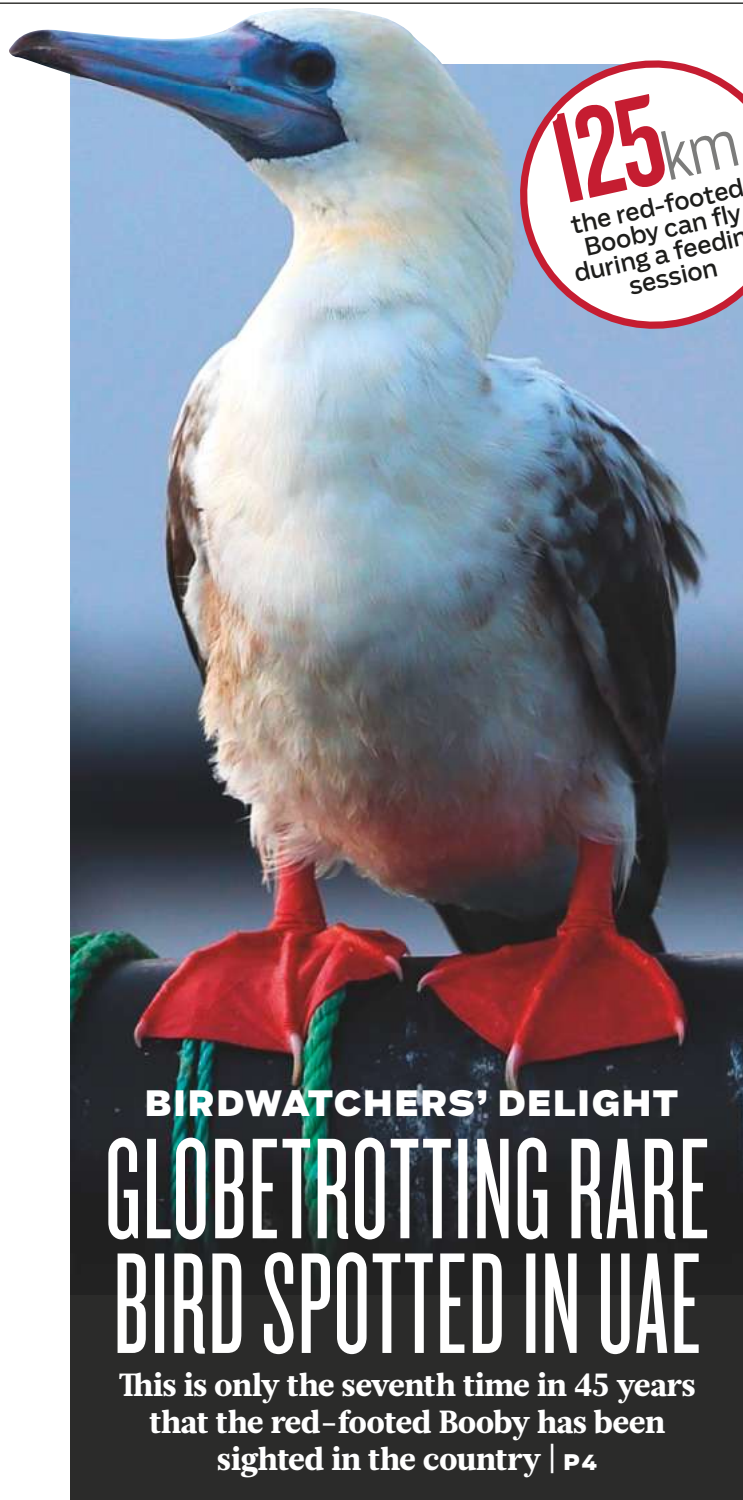
"This exceptional performance reflects Dubai's commitment to maintaining its lead," said Shaikh Ahmad Bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President of Dubai Civil Aviation Authority, in a tweet yesterday.

The airport's 2019's annual traffic was 86.3 million. It had 89.1 million passengers in 2018 — its busiest-ever year before the pandemic, while 66 million passengers passed through in 2022.

Early projections show that DXB is expected to have 88.8 million guests in 2024, putting the 'hub within striking distance of the all-time high record set in 2018.

"Dubai is setting new benchmarks in passenger experience with excellence levels and innovative technologies that constantly redefine airport services," said Shaikh Ahmad.

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Israel warns Hamas ahead of Ramadan

SAYS WILL FIGHT DURING FASTING
MONTH UNLESS HOSTAGES FREED

GAZA STRIP

Deadly fighting raged on in Gaza yesterday after Israel warned that, unless Hamas frees all hostages, it will push on with its offensive during the holy month of Ramadan, including in the far-southern Rafah area.

Global concern has mounted over the fate of 1.4 million Palestinians who have been forced into Rafah near the Egyptian border, enduring bombardment and dire food shortages as they live in crowded makeshift shelters and tents.

Overnight strikes and battles in Gaza killed more than 100 Palestinians, mostly women and children, pushing the death toll past 29,000, said the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, with fighting heaviest in Khan Yunis, just north of Rafah.

Rafah offensive plans

War cabinet member Benny Gantz warned on Sunday that the Israeli army is ready to push deeper into Rafah during Ramadan which, based on the lunar calendar, starts around March 10.

"The world must know, and



**Hamas has a choice.
They can surrender,
release the hostages,
and the civilians of
Gaza can celebrate the
feast of Ramadan."**

Benny Gantz

| War cabinet member

Hamas leaders must know: if by Ramadan the hostages are not home, the fighting will continue everywhere to include the Rafah area," said Gantz.

"We will do so in a coordinated manner, facilitating the evacuation of civilians in dialogue with American and Egyptian partners and to minimise the civilian casualties as much as possible."

He added: "Hamas has a choice. They can surrender, release the hostages, and the civilians of Gaza can celebrate the feast of Ramadan."

Israel has so far failed to specify where Palestinians could flee after more than four months of war have flattened vast swathes of the Gaza Strip.

—AFP

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Passenger at DXB helps Sharjah family reunite with missing teen

Felix, 18, who is autistic, had gone missing from a shopping mall

SHARJAH

BY SAJILA SASEENDRAN
Senior Reporter

An Indian father has revealed the chain of events that led to a reunion with his missing autistic son in Sharjah.

Felix Jeby Thomas, 18, is safe and sound now with his family. He had disappeared from City Centre Sharjah, where he had gone with his mother and sister on Saturday night, said his father Jeby Thomas.

For more than a day, there was hope — but also fear and worry — about his situation. Felix is a student of Al Ibtisama Centre for People with Disabilities and has communication challenges.

The family — who are from the south Indian state of Kerala — had sought help from

police and community members to find him, posting his details on social media, asking residents in the area, trying to check any CCTV footage in the hopes of catching a glimpse of Felix.

Finally — after almost 30 hours — the good news came. A video circulating on social media showing Felix outside a hospital in Sharjah, smiling and hugging his dad, brought relief.

The tip-off

Thomas, the boy's father, said the family had not sought any explanation from the teenager. "We just want him to rest and recover now."

The search was over — all thanks to a tip-off from an alert passenger departing Dubai International Airport on Sunday.

FULL STORY ON P3



■ Felix Jeby Thomas

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