

European flights start gradually taking off

New ash cloud looms on Britain

AP, Paris

Applause, cheers and whoops of joy rang out at airports around the world yesterday as airplanes gradually took to the skies after five days of being grounded by a volcanic ash cloud that has devastated European travel.

But weary passengers might have to temper their enthusiasm. Only limited flights were allowed to resume at some European airports and UK authorities said London airports a major hub for thousands of daily flights worldwide would remain closed for at least another day due to new danger from the invisible ash cloud.

And with over 95,000 flights cancelled in the last week alone, airlines face the enormous task of working through the backlog to get passengers where they want to go a challenge that certainly will take days.

Still, in airport hubs that have been cauldrons of anxiety, anger and sleep deprivation, Tuesday marked a day of collective relief.

The boards at Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport announcing long-distance flights which had been streaked with red "cancelled" signs for five days filled up with white "on time" signs Tuesday and the first commercial flight out since Thursday left for New York's John F Kennedy Airport.

"We were in the hotel having break-

Europe's aviation chaos

Ash from Icelandic volcano has grounded flights across Europe



- Hundreds of thousands of long-distance passengers stranded around the globe
- Airlines lose 200 million US dollars of revenue a day and face massive re-routing costs
- Airfreight ban hits exporters around the world, such as flower and fruit growers in Africa

AFP (10/410) *source: IATA

cancelled. "There's hope," he said. Basso, 81, and his son have tickets for a flight to Los Angeles later Tuesday. At New York's JFK, the first flight

from Amsterdam in days arrived Monday night.

"Everyone was screaming in the airplane from happiness," said passenger Savvas Toumarides, of Cyprus, who missed his sister's New York wedding after getting stranded in Amsterdam last Thursday. He said the worst part was "waiting and waiting and not knowing."

The Eurocontrol air traffic agency in Brussels said it expects 55 to 60 percent of flights over Europe to go ahead Tuesday, a marked improvement over the last few days. By midmorning, 10,000 of Europe's 27,500 daily flights were scheduled to go.

"The situation today is much improved," said Brian Flynn, deputy head of operations at the Brussels-based agency. "The outlook is that bit by bit, normal flights will be resumed in coming days."

The agency predicted close to normal takeoffs by Friday.

Still, an international pilots group warned that ash remains a danger and meteorologists say Iceland's still-erupting volcano isn't ready to rest yet, promising more choked airspace and flight delays to come.

Ash that had drifted over the North Sea from the volcano in southern Iceland was being pushed back over Britain on Tuesday by shifty north winds, Icelandic scientists said.

Obama affirms strong US-Israel ties

No way to 'impose' ME peace: Netanyahu

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama has said on the Jewish state's 62nd anniversary that the United States shares an "unbreakable bond" with Israel and he was confident the relationship "will only be strengthened" into the future.

Despite tensions between Obama and the government of hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the US leader stressed that he looks "forward to continuing our efforts with Israel to achieve comprehensive peace and security in the region, including a two-state solution."

On the anniversary, Obama said in a statement released by the White House that "we once again honour the extraordinary achievements of

the people of Israel, and their deep and abiding friendship with the American people."

Earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Monday poured cold water on the notion of any dramatic new US peace plan, as speculation mounted over Washington's next move in the Middle East impasse.

Netanyahu, in an interview with ABC television, argued that Israelis and Palestinians would have to negotiate towards a final settlement, not work off a new document defining the eventual parameters for a Palestinian state.

"I don't believe anyone will seriously think that you can impose peace. Peace has to come from the parties sitting down with each other, resolving their differences," said Netanyahu.

Somali pirates seize Thai ships

AP, Nairobi

Somali pirates hijacked three Thai fishing vessels with 77 crew aboard more than 1,200 miles (1,930 kilometres) from the Somali coast, the farthest-off-shore attack to date, the EU Naval Force said yesterday.

Pirates have expanded their range south and east in response to an increase in patrols by European and American warships off the Somali shore.

The hijacking of the three Thai vessels happened Sunday, said Cmdr. John Harbour, a spokesman for the EU Naval Force. The attack took place well outside the area that the EU force operates in, he said.

The three vessels the MV Prantalay 11, 12, and 14 have 77 crew onboard in total. All the crew are Thai, Harbour said. The owner of the vessels is PT Interfishery Ltd.

Pirates have increased attacks against shipping vessels over the last year in hopes of netting the multi-million dollar ransoms they can earn.

WB DEPORTATIONS Abbas to fight Israeli orders

BBC ONLINE

Palestinian officials say they will oppose new Israeli orders to deport Palestinians from the West Bank.

Last week it was revealed the Israeli Defence Force changed their orders broadening the definition of people they could remove from the West Bank.

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas said he was prepared to take the issue to the UN Security Council, reports say.

China govt declares day of mourning

AFP, Xining

China declared a national day of mourning for victims of last week's earthquake as rescuers battled altitude sickness and bad weather conditions in the Tibetan disaster zone yesterday.

The government said the nation would be in mourning on Wednesday with flags around the country and at embassies and consulates worldwide flown at half-mast a week after the 6.9-magnitude quake hit a remote corner of Qinghai province.

Iran missile could reach US by 2015 Warns Pentagon

ANI, Washington

A US Defence Department report has warned that Iran could fire a missile at the United States by 2015, and adds that the Iranians have gone to great lengths to protect their nuclear infrastructure from physical destruction.

"With sufficient foreign assistance, Iran could probably develop and test an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the United States by 2015," Fox News quoted the new 12 page unclassified report, as saying.

The report further claims that Iran's military strategy is designed to defend against external or "hard" threats from the United States and Israel.

"Iran continues being a disruptive force inside Iraq. Iran also offers strategic and operational guidance to militias and terrorist groups to target US Forces in Iraq and undermine US interests," the report said.

Sanctions unlikely to stop Iran nuke plans

TIME ONLINE

Defence Secretary Robert Gates, according to Sunday's New York Times, warned President Obama in a classified memo in January that the US lacks an effective strategy for dealing with Iran's nuclear progress. Secretary Gates rushed to set the record straight, saying his memo had been designed to "contribute to an orderly and timely decision-making process." But that may all be a distinction without much of a difference; the sentiments attributed to him in the original report remain a coldly clear assessment of the Administration's Iran strategy.

The Times reported that Gates had warned that the US had no clear policy guidelines in place if Iran ignored international sanctions and continued to develop its nuclear program to the point that it became a "threshold" power. At that point it would (as Japan is reputed to) have all the major components necessary to quickly assemble a bomb but still refrain from taking the final steps in order to remain within the terms of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Many analysts and policymakers believe that reaching such a threshold, rather than obtaining a full strategic nuclear arsenal, is Iran's current goal.

Administration officials, the Times story suggests, hope to prevent Iran from achieving even threshold capability, although it's tough to see how that will be accomplished.



PHOTO: AFP
Russian soldiers march during a rehearsal of a military parade in Alabino outside Moscow yesterday. The parade will take place on the Red square in Moscow on May 9, 2010 during celebrations for the 65th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Migraine attack leads woman speaking Chinese

ANI, London

A British woman left doctors confused when she started conversing in Chinese after a migraine attack.

A resident of Plymouth, 35-year-old Sarah Colwill was shocked to see her Devon accent change into Chinese, reports The Daily Express.

Colwill is suffering with a rare kind of sporadic hemiplegic migraines, which cause the blood vessels in her brain to expand.

"I knew I sounded different but didn't know how much."

The ambulance crew said I sounded Chinese. I have never even been to China. At first it was quite funny but my voice is annoying me now," she said.

'Immoral women cause quakes'

BBC ONLINE

Promiscuous women are responsible for earthquakes, a senior Iranian cleric has said.

Hojatolislam Kazem Sedighi told worshippers in Tehran last Friday that they had to stick to strict codes of modesty to protect themselves.

"Many women who do not dress modestly lead young men astray and spread adultery in society which increases earthquakes," he said.

Red Shirts back off after live fire threat

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand yesterday toughened its stance against anti-government protesters, warning they would face live weapons fire and tear gas in any fresh clashes with security forces.

Ten days after 25 people were killed and 800 injured in a failed attempt to dislodge the red-shirted demonstrators, the government said it was determined to end four weeks of rallies but would not give a date for the crackdown.

Confronted by the newly muscular approach and an intimidating military presence deployed in Bangkok's financial hub, the protesters were forced to cancel plans for a march to the strategic district.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva did not rule out the prospect of martial law being declared to rout the Red Shirts, who have established a massive encampment in the capital's retail heartland. "The military will make any decision over

whether to declare martial law or not," Abhisit told reporters, adding that authorities would launch a crackdown in their own time.

"Security officials are not complacent, we will take quick action and do it to the best of our ability. The government does not want to see protracted protests but it's not easy as they are armed."

The army adopted gloves-off rhetoric towards the demonstrators who have paralysed parts of the capital and forced major shopping centres to close, wreaking havoc on business life and the tourism industry in particular.

"Security forces will begin by firing tear gas and if they cannot stop protesters, then soldiers will start taking decisive action with live bullets," army spokesman Colonel Sunsern Kaewkumnerd said.

Sunsern targeted shadowy black-clad provocateurs accused of kicking off the April 10 violence, who have been disowned by both sides of Thailand's political divide, referring to them as "terrorists".

Tailbacks greet new road

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panorama from the overpass, why there was such a long tail back.

"I interviewed people and they said the traffic congestion started just after the inauguration of the road," the journalist told the biker.

Indeed, the Tejgaon-Bijoy Sarani side of the 60-foot wide link road experienced huge traffic congestion just 10 minutes after the prime minister inaugurated it.

It took 38 minutes for this correspondent to pass the 1.4km long road by a motorbike yesterday afternoon.

Traffic on the roads in the central part of the city was much less yesterday as the New Market and Bashundhara City Complex were closed, and it took just two minutes to reach the Tejgaon intersection where the link road hits the Tongi Diversion Road by a motorbike from Karwan Bazar, a distance of around two kilometres.

People from Rampura, Malibagh, Khilgaon, Badda, Maghbazar, Ramna and those travelling from Mohakhali and Tejgaon to Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur or Gabtoli suffered terribly on the newly built link road.

Many, however, took the road just to see what it is like.

Asked what he thought about the new road, a CNG-run

autorickshaw driver said, "I took the link road thinking it would take less time through this road to reach my destination, but it now seems that people are going to suffer in the same old way."

Annoyed at the congestion and the sultry April weather, a taxicab driver said traffic situation is not going to improve in Dhaka city even if the government builds 100 roads until a significant portion of city dwellers leave the city.

A youth of Nakhhalpara, who lives just beside the link road and had been watching activities since morning, said traffic congestion on the road was like this the whole day.

A traffic policeman on duty at the Bijoy Sarani intersection said there are four signals at the intersection, and if each signal takes two minutes on average, the link road opens every eight minutes for a duration of just one or two minutes, which is worsening the situation.

The Daily Star published a story in 2007 about the Bijoy Sarani-Tejgaon link road. Experts said at that time that if the 120-foot wide Bijoy Sarani is narrowed down to 60 feet at the linking point, the "funnel" would create severe bottleneck in traffic movement instead of easing it.

2 Russian policemen shot dead

AP, Makhachkala

Police in Russia's unsettled southern province of Dagestan say assailants have gunned down two traffic policemen who pulled over their car.

A spokesman for Dagestan's Interior Ministry told The Associated Press that yesterday morning's attack took place in the centre of the provincial capital, Makhachkala.

Spokesman Vyacheslav Gadzhiev says the three men in the car unexpectedly produced Kalashnikov automatic rifles when asked for their documents. He says one policeman died immediately and his colleague a little later in the hospital.

Such attacks are common not only in Dagestan but across Russia's predominantly Muslim North Caucasus region, where authorities are fighting an entrenched and militant Islamist separatist movement.



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