

Heathrow puts curbs to cope with travel surge

A Monitor Report

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London : Heathrow Airport has urged airlines to stop selling summer tickets and set a daily limit of 100,000 passenger departures, as it struggles to cope with recent travel surge.

The airport in London has been experiencing a chaotic situation recently, as well as many other airports in the United Kingdom, with long queue times amid shortages of ground staff and airlines cancelling thousands of flights.

Airlines had planned to operate flights that would result in about 104,000 passengers a day at Heathrow, the airport said.

It added, on average, about 1,500 of the excess 4,000 daily seats had already been sold, "and so we are asking our partners to stop selling summer tickets to limit the impact on passengers".

Before the pandemic, about 110,000 to 125,000 people departed from Heathrow every day over the summer, on average.

Apologising to those affected, Heathrow said the passenger cap would mean some summer journeys would either be moved to another day or airport, or be cancelled.

"Over the past few weeks, as departing passenger numbers have regularly exceeded 100,000 a day, we have started to see periods when service drops to a level that is not acceptable: long queue times, delays for passengers requiring assistance, bags not travelling with passengers or arriving late, low punctuality and last-minute cancellations," said John Holland-Kaye, Chief Executive, Heathrow

Airport in a letter to passengers on July 12.

"Some airlines have taken significant action, but others have not, and we believe that further action is needed now to ensure passengers have a safe and reliable journey."

"We have therefore made the difficult decision to introduce a capacity cap with effect from July 12 to September 11," he added.

Heathrow said it had seen "40 years of passenger growth in just four months" as air travel bounced back from the Covid-19 pandemic.

It started recruiting more staff last November and by the end of July would have as many people working in security as before the pandemic, it said.

During the pandemic, airlines and airports laid off tens of thousands of staff and some have not returned.

The new staff were "learning fast but are not yet up to full speed", the airport said.

However, there are still shortages of critical staff, in particular ground handlers, who are contracted by airlines to provide check-in staff, load and unload bags and turn around aircraft.