

Airlines must use 80pc UK airport slots or lose them

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Dhaka: Airlines operating at the United Kingdom airports will have to use 80 per cent of their take-off and landing slots or else they will lose them, the British government said on January 31, in a move to return to pre-covid rules.

The "use it or lose it" 80:20 rule, which was waived when Covid-19 led to a fall in passenger numbers, will return from March 26, 2023 as demand for international travel surges, Britain's Department for Transport said.

"Slots rules will return to normal this summer," British Transport Secretary Mark Harper is due to say in a speech at the Airport Operators' Association's annual conference, according to advance extracts released by the department as per reports.

Airport slots are limited and highly valuable, providing airlines permission to use airport infrastructure like runways and terminals at a specific date and time.

A safety net for airlines introduced during the pandemic will remain in place,

allowing carriers such as British Airways, Easyjet and Ryanair, to hand back 5 per cent of their slots before the start of the season to help avoid last-minute cancellations.

There will also be flexibility over when airlines are justified not to use their slots, such as where either end of a route is affected by coronavirus restrictions, the government added.

Industry body Airlines UK said it welcomed this flexibility so that airlines are not punished by travel restrictions.

"Airlines recognise that as passenger demand returns and we approach another busy summer then the slot rules must follow suit. Global recovery is still bumpy though and we're not yet fully back to normal," a spokesperson said, according to reports.

The government said its decision followed a consultation with the industry on how best to support its recovery from the pandemic. By October 2022, passenger numbers at UK airports had reached 85 per cent of the equivalent 2019 levels, it added.

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