

French air traffic strike deepens travel chaos

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: A strike by French air traffic controllers triggered a second consecutive day on Friday (June 4) of disruption across European skies, as the busy summer travel season gained momentum.

Hundreds of thousands of passengers were affected, with more than 1,100 flights to and from France cancelled, along with many others scheduled to fly over the country.

Paris airports experienced even more severe disruptions than on Thursday (June 3), the first day of the strike. The walkout was called by two unions protesting against chronic understaffing and what they described as "toxic management" within the aviation authority.

The timing of the strike is particularly acute as Friday was the final day of school in France before the summer holidays.

At Paris airports, passengers stared at departure boards loaded with

cancellations to assess their options. Some travellers appeared distraught.

Sabrina Taristas, 42, was set to fly to the southern French city of Toulouse.

“We can’t go against the strike, but it’s true that it’s a real inconvenience for us travellers,” she said.

France’s civil aviation authority said 1,125 flights had been cancelled on Friday, compared to 933 on Thursday. French flag-carrier Air France said its long-haul flights were not affected. The travel disruption also affected hotels.

Many travellers cancelled hotel bookings, particularly in cities with large airports such as Nice and Paris.

“There’s a bit of panic among those arriving and those leaving, airlines are trying to rebook their customers, it’s complicated to manage and it’s going to cost them a lot,” Veronique Siegel of the UMIH union said.

In the Mediterranean city of Nice, the airport said 200 trips had been cancelled on Thursday, and 220 on Friday, affecting 50,000 passengers. The government condemned the strike.

“Choosing the day when everyone goes on holiday to go on strike at air traffic control is taking the French hostage,” Prime Minister Francois Bayrou told broadcaster BFMTV.

Transport Minister Philippe Tabarot said the strike was “unacceptable”.

UNSA-ICNA, the second biggest labour group in the sector, launched the action to protest against “chronic understaffing”, the introduction of a clocking-in system, outdated equipment and “toxic management practices that are incompatible with the requirements of calm and safety”.

The third largest union, USAC-CGT, joined the strike but not the main SNCTA union.

The effects of the strike were not limited to France and the stoppage has triggered hundreds of cancellations of flights that fly over the country.

The European Airlines for Europe (A4E) association said 1,500 flights

would be cancelled on Thursday and Friday in Europe, affecting 300,000 passengers.

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