

Holidaymakers suffer as pilots walk out and BA computers crash

By Oliver Gill, Bill Gardner and Greg Wilford

UK-BASED Ryanair pilots have piled fresh misery on to holidaymakers by announcing industrial action as people return from their summer break.

The British Airline Pilots' Association (Balpa) authorised strikes from Aug 22-23 and from Sept 2-4, in a move that could leave operations grinding to a halt at Stansted, the Irish airline's biggest single base.

The news came as Alex Cruz, 54, the boss of British Airways, was under fire after its latest computer meltdown left more than 200,000 travellers stranded.

BA said it would operate a normal schedule today, but warned of "knock-on" disruption due to the IT glitch. The airline now faces a compensation bill of at least £8million.

About 600 Ryanair pilots were balloted yesterday, with Balpa saying eight in 10 backed the strikes. Turnout was 72 per cent.

The union said "decades of Ryanair refusing to deal with unions" had prompted the action over issues including maternity benefits and "a fair, transparent, and consistent pay structure".

Earlier this year, Ryanair put its boss, Michael O'Leary, in line for one of the biggest paydays in corporate history, handing him share options that could be worth €100million (£92million).

Brian Stratton, Balpa general secretary, said: "We have had no formal offer

from Ryanair and it is imperative that we resolve this dispute urgently to avoid strike action." Ryanair said it was "disappointed" at the news. It claimed an independent poll showed only 57 per cent of pilots backed a strike.

"This industrial action has no mandate from Ryanair pilots," Ryanair said.

Meanwhile, Balpa insisted that the strike action was "unconnected" to the ongoing dispute between BA and its pilots. The UK carrier remains locked in talks with its union over pay, with separate strikes continuing to loom.

The latest twist in a summer of chaos – one that has also seen scores of flights cancelled at Heathrow in a row between workers and the airport – came as BA was hit by an IT meltdown.

Trouble began at 4.30am when early passengers complained that they could not check in for their flights online.

Within hours, long queues built up at Heathrow and Gatwick, while planes full of passengers were told to stay on the runway. Customers were stuck in Manchester, Newcastle and Edinburgh as well as in Japan, India and the US.

Last night, BA said: "We have resolved the temporary systems issue from earlier today and apologised to customers who were affected."

Meanwhile, some flights and train services in Scotland were cancelled by flooding caused by torrential rain. The railway at Winchburgh, near Edinburgh, was closed, and flights were redirected from Edinburgh to Glasgow.



Steps ashore

James Cracknell takes Kate Garraway, the presenter, into a dance hold after being unveiled on *Good Morning Britain* yesterday as the 14th contestant for this year's BBC series of *Strictly Come Dancing*. The double Olympic gold medallist, who rowed for Cambridge in this year's Boat Race, joked he was looking forward to learning a new skill "having spent so many years mucking around in a rowing boat with big men in tight Lycra". Annika Rice, the presenter, was later revealed as the final celebrity in this year's cohort.

Turbulent time ahead as flights are rocked by climate change

By Sarah Knapton
SCIENCE EDITOR

TURBULENCE on flights is getting worse because of climate change, with the jet stream becoming choppier since the Seventies.

The University of Reading has discovered that the jet stream has become 15 per cent more affected by wind shear in the upper atmosphere over the North Atlantic since satellites began observing it in 1979.

Over the same period, the number of passengers and crew seriously injured during turbulence globally has gone from one to two in a million, reaching 8,000 a year.

Wind shear – the increase in wind speed at high altitudes – causes turbulence that can be severe enough to throw passengers from their seats. Researchers predicted the problem would worsen as the climate continued to change through global warming.

Simon Lee, a doctoral student in meteorology at the University of Reading, said: "We looked for the first time at the wind shear, where significant change has previously gone unnoticed."

"Over the past four decades, temperatures have risen most rapidly over the Arctic, while in the stratosphere – around 12km [7.5 miles] above the surface – they have cooled. This has created a tug-of-war effect, where surface temperature changes act to slow the jet down, while temperature changes higher up act to speed it up."

Tens of thousands of planes encounter severe turbulence every year, with an estimated annual cost to the global aviation sector of up to a billion dollars, through flight delays, injuries and structural damage to aircraft.

The research was published in the journal *Nature*.

Women fire gun ownership to record high

By Charles Hymas
HOME AFFAIRS EDITOR

WOMEN taking up shooting as a sport has led to record high levels of guns licensed in England and Wales.

The number of firearms has risen from 435,000 in 2008-09 to 596,000 in 2018-19, with the number owned by women rising 10 per cent in two years, from 32,400 to 35,600. Enthusiasts attributed it to the way clubs had cast

off their traditional image as bastions of male privilege and made themselves more female-friendly.

To encourage more women, clubs have staged female-only sessions, typified by *Femme Fatales*, a group of women shooters who set it up to "challenge the misconception that shooting is a man's game".

Lydia Abdelaoui, the founder of *Femme Fatales*, said participants were more likely to don sportswear than

adopt the "*Downton Abbey* and farmers in tweed look".

Andrew Mercer, secretary general of the UK National Rifle Association, said shooting was a sport that embraced an age range from 10 to 94.

Bill Harriman, director of firearms for the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, said that the UK "rightly" had some of the strictest firearms laws and added that public safety was "of the highest priority."

Reducing air toxins could cut child asthma

By Henry Bodkin
HEALTH CORRESPONDENT

REDUCING pollution could prevent more than 44,000 cases of childhood asthma in the UK, a study has found.

The analysis suggests that up to a third of new cases of childhood asthma in Europe are caused by air pollution. Around 1.1million children are believed to suffer from asthma in the UK.

It is thought that pollution from

traffic can damage airways, leading to inflammation and the development of asthma in children who are genetically predisposed to the condition.

The study, led by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health, looked at the burden of asthma on 63,442,419 children across 18 European countries, including the UK, in 2016.

They compared asthma incidence rates with estimations of levels of exposure to pollutants in areas covering

more than 580,000 sq miles in 2010.

Finally, they estimated how rates could be affected if levels were reduced in two different scenarios.

They found that 11.4 per cent of the total cases of asthma – 66,567 – could be prevented each year if countries adhered to the maximum air pollution levels recommended by the World Health Organisation.

This equates to more than 10,000 cases in the UK.



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