



Lead Stories

Ash-triggered flight diversions cost airlines \$1.7 billion

Former IOC President Samaranch dies at 89

Death toll from Chinese earthquake passes 2,000

US Treasury unveils new \$100 note

Ash-triggered flight diversions cost airlines \$1.7 billion

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) said today that the flight disruptions triggered by the recent eruption of a volcano in Iceland cost the global airline industry a total of \$1.7 billion dollars.

According to the IATA, airlines lost a total of \$400 million daily for the first three days of the week that European airspace was closed. The closures also impacted an estimated 1.2 million passengers around the world each day, until airspace around Europe began reopening last night. IATA's chief executive officer, Giovanni Bisignani, said that "[f]or an industry that lost \$9.4bn last year and was forecast to lose a further \$2.8bn in 2010, this crisis is devastating." He also claimed that the airline industry would require

three years to recover from the effects of the crisis, and called on governments to provide some form of compensation to airlines.

Bisignani also criticized the response of European governments to the ash threat, saying that they had over-reacted and the shutdown of all airspace was excessive. He said that "Airspace was being closed based on theoretical models, not on facts. Test flights by our members showed that

the models were wrong. [The crisis] is an extraordinary situation exaggerated by a poor decision-making process by national governments." Individual airlines also criticized the airspace closures. Micheal O'Leary, CEO of Ryanair, said that "It might have made sense to ground flights for a day or two...But by the time that that cloud has dispersed through 800 or 1,000 nautical miles of air space, a full ban should never have been imposed."

In defense of the European airspace controller, Eurocontrol, the CEO of the Irish Aviation Authority, Eamonn Brennan, said: "It's important to realize that we've never experienced in Europe something like this before. So it wasn't just a simple matter of

saying: Yes, you could have operated on Saturday or Sunday or Monday. We needed the four days of test flights, the empirical data, to put this together and to understand the levels of ash that engines can absorb." Additionally, scientists in Switzerland said that studies of ash content in the atmosphere were high enough that the total closure of most European airspace was warranted.

Restrictions over air travel in Europe have been lifted in many parts of the continent today; three-quarters of the scheduled flights were operating, and most of the European airspace having been opened. Only parts of British, French and Irish airspace remain closed, and most of Europe's major airports are open, although not necessarily operating at full capacity; at London Heathrow Airport, about half the scheduled departing flights were canceled.

Death toll from Chinese earthquake passes 2,000

The death toll from a 6.9 magnitude earthquake in the Qinghai province in western China has surpassed two thousand.

The official number of dead is now at 2,039, with another 195 missing. 12,135 people were injured by the temblor, over 1,400 of which were said to be in serious condition. The quake's epicentre was in the Yushu county. On Tuesday, rescuers were still searching for survivors buried beneath the rubble of collapsed buildings in and around the town of Jiegu, one of the most badly affected places.

Officials have increased their relief efforts, bringing food, blankets, tents, and other assistance to the area.

Yesterday, an official remembrance day for those killed was held; public entertainment was limited and national Chinese flags flew at half mask.

Former IOC President Samaranch dies at 8

Juan Antonio Samaranch, former head of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), has died in Barcelona at the age of 89.

A former diplomat and Spanish ambassador in Moscow elected to the IOC in 1980, Samaranch was largely credited with the renewal of the Olympic movement over two decades marked by boycotts, bribery and drug scandals. While appearing to be small in stature and uncomfortable speaking in public, he

was viewed as an often ruthless operator who could forge consensus within an often fractious Olympic movement and bring IOC members to deliver what he wanted.

Samaranch was admitted to hospital on Sunday with heart trouble and passed away at approximately 11:25 UTC, marking one of a number of occasions he has fallen ill. Even in retirement, with advancing age and medical issues, Samaranch continued to travel and be active in Olympic circles, working to try and secure both the 2012 Olympics and 2016 Olympics for Madrid as well as attending various sport conferences.

"I cannot find the words to express the distress of the Olympic Family," current IOC president Jacques Rogge was quoted as saying, also making mention of the personal inspiration he drew from Samaranch.

During his time in office, Samaranch worked to help increase the number of participating countries at the Olympics, oversaw the creation of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) and the creation of the IOC Athletes Commission.

Prior to his election to the role of IOC president in 1980, he had a long background in sports, having held roles with the Spanish Skating Federation, Spanish National

Olympic Committee and as Chef de Mission at the games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Rome and Tokyo.

US Supreme Court overturns ban on videos depicting animal cruelty

The US Supreme Court yesterday overturned an eleven-year-old law banning videos that depicted animal cruelty, ruling that such a law violated free speech rights under the First Amendment to the US Constitution.

The court's 8-1 ruling overturns a law enacted in 1999 that banned the trade of "depictions of animal cruelty," including "conduct in which a living animal is intentionally maimed, mutilated, tortured, wounded or killed." The case was prompted by the prosecution of Robert J. Stevens, who had filmed and sold videos of dogfights, and subsequently was sentenced in 2005 to 37 months in prison, although he has yet to begin his sentence; his case has remained on appeal.

According to Chief Justice John Roberts Jr, the law overturned by the court had been "a criminal prohibition of alarming breadth." The law had been defended by the US government, which had argued that videos of cruelty to animals had no value, and should therefore receive no protection by the First Amendment. Roberts argued the point in his written statement on the ruling, saying that "The First Amendment means that government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, its ideas, its subject matter or its content." According to Roberts, the law had been too broad, and the court was therefore unwilling to place it outside the protection of the First Amendment.

Reactions to the ruling were mixed. A group called the Media Coalition supported the ruling, saying that "If the court were to rewrite the First Amendment every time an unpopular or distasteful subject was at issue, we wouldn't have any free speech left." The US Humane Society called for a new law to be written by Congress, this one more narrow in scope. The society's president, Wayne Pacelle, said that "Congress should act swiftly to make sure the First Amendment is not used as a shield for those committing barbaric acts of cruelty, and then peddling their videos on the Internet."

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