

## Business

# British Airways loses height in latest UK customer survey

## Consumers find Ryanair the worst short-haul airline

**LONDON:** British Airways has sunk in the view of UK customers over the last year, with the former flag carrier now ranked third bottom short-haul airline, two places above budget carrier Ryanair.

Since being named the best short-haul airline in 2015, BA has been on a downwards trajectory according to the survey by consumer group Which, and it dropped another two places this year. In long-haul BA fared even worse, coming second to last and only beating American Airlines, in a category that was topped by Singapore Airlines. On an overall customer score basis, Which said BA scored 55 percent on short-haul, only 1 percentage point behind last year, and 55 percent on long-haul, not far behind the 58 percent it scored last year. Ryanair's score actually rose to 44 percent from 40 percent.

A spokeswoman for British Airways said the survey did not reflect its own findings.

"Our own data shows customer satisfaction scores have increased, and continue to increase," she said.

Ryanair was the worst short-haul airline the consumers found, a repeat of its 2018 performance, while Ryanair's rival budget carrier easyJet came mid-table. Jet2, another low-cost carrier, was one of the best performers in the short-haul category. Which said that holiday-makers complained about Ryanair requiring them to pay extra for add-ons and luggage, while they gave BA low scores for the quality of its food and drink, the comfort of its seats and value for money.

Some high-profile problems have dragged on BA's reputation lately. A 48-hour pilot strike in September cancelled thousands of flights, while in both 2018 and 2017 I.T. and computer failures disrupted flights and stranded customers.

Additionally in 2017, BA, which is owned by IAG, stopped offering customers free food and drink in economy class on short-haul flights. Which said 6,535 members completed the survey in September 2019 answering questions about their experiences of flying with an airline from the UK. — Reuters



British Airways Airbus A319-131 makes its final approach for landing at Toulouse-Blagnac airport, France. —Reuters

## BoE launches probe into eavesdropping

**LONDON:** The Bank of England launched a probe yesterday after discovering some investors eavesdropped on press briefings moments before they were broadcast, reportedly to hand a split-second advantage to high-speed traders.

The Times newspaper reported that one of the BoE's suppliers had been sending a market-sensitive audio feed of the bank's press conferences to hedge funds moments before the rest of the world. The BoE, which will announce its latest interest rate decision at 1200 GMT, responded in a brief statement that it has identified the feed that had been misused by a third-party supplier—and whose access had now been revoked. "Following concerns raised with the bank, we have recently identified that an audio feed of certain of the bank press conferences—installed only to act as a back-up in case the video feed failed—has been misused by a third party supplier to the bank since earlier this year to supply services to other external clients," the bank said overnight.

The video feed of the bank's press conferences has a slight delay, while the audio feed was live.

At press conferences following monetary policy decisions the BoE's governor makes comments on policy, some of which can produce considerable swings in the value of the pound. Even several seconds advantage could give traders the possibility to earn considerable returns. "This wholly unacceptable use of the audio feed was without the bank's knowledge or consent, and is being investigated further," added the BoE.

"On identifying this, the bank immediately disabled the third party supplier's access. "As a result, the third party supplier did not have any access to the most recent press



**LONDON:** In this file photo taken on December 16, 2019 Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England speaks during a Financial Stability Report press conference. —AFP

conference and will no longer play any part in any of the bank's future press conferences."

A spokesman for Britain's Financial Conduct Authority regulator meanwhile told AFP that it was "looking at the issue" but declined to make further comment. The BoE will meanwhile reveal its first interest rate call since Prime Minister Boris Johnson's landslide election victory one week ago, and ahead of Brexit next month.

The bank is expected to keep its key lending rate at 0.75 percent, as speculation also swirls over an imminent appointment of the successor to departing Governor Mark Carney.

Johnson will seek to push through Britain's exit from the European Union on January 31 — when Carney is also due to step down. The prime minister, whose ruling Conservative Party won the biggest majority since the 1980s heyday of Margaret Thatcher, wants to embrace Brexit and kick-start growth in Britain's stalling economy. Yet markets remain fearful of a no-deal Brexit after Johnson signalled he will outlaw any extension to a Brexit transition beyond the end of 2020. —AFP

## Nigeria needs to 'be ready' for oil decline, says minister

**MADRID:** Nigeria, Africa's largest oil-producing country, understands it will have little choice but to wean its economy off a reliance on fossil fuels as the world inches onto a low-carbon path, its environment minister said. Mohammad Mahmood Abubakar said he did not see a long-term future for Nigeria's oil industry if governments follow through on their promise under the 2015 Paris Agreement to cut planet-warming emissions to net-zero by the second half of the century. "These days, anything to do with fossil fuel... may have its days numbered, or years numbered," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation at this month's UN climate talks in Madrid.

Abubakar said Nigeria should use the royalties and export earnings it receives from oil - which account for about half of its revenues - to invest in alternative sources of energy, in order to "be ready" for a global transition to cleaner energy. "If the world is truly willing... to quit fossil fuel, then if you are not ready and finally the world comes to terms with that and there are alternatives and no one is buying enough oil from you, at that point you are in trouble," he said. Africa's most populous nation has started to diversify into renewable power generated from solar, wind and waste and is moving its universities onto solar power systems, he added.

It is also making efforts to end gas flaring from oil-industry operations on its soil by 2030, as part of its national climate action plan submitted to the United Nations. Burning off the gas is a waste of energy and a major source of planet-warming emissions, and Nigeria is procuring technology to capture the gas instead to produce power or heat water, said the minister, a biologist and environmental protection expert. The West African nation's climate action plan also pledges to improve its energy grid and expand the use of efficient gas power plants, in an effort to cut widespread use of polluting diesel generators. —Reuters