

## International

# US suspends flights by Chinese airlines in spat with Beijing

## China to allow limited US passenger flights

**WASHINGTON:** Washington on Wednesday ordered the suspension of all flights by Chinese airlines into and out of the United States after Beijing failed to allow American carriers to resume services to China.

The move adds to a growing friction between the world's two largest economies amid the coronavirus crisis and in the wake of a two-year trade war that has not been fully resolved. The US action takes effect June 16 but could be implemented sooner if President Donald Trump orders it, the Department of Transportation (DOT) said.

The suspension applies to seven Chinese civilian carriers, although only four currently are running services to US cities, including Air China and China Eastern Airlines, the Department of Transportation (DOT) said. "US carriers have asked to resume passenger service, beginning June 1st. The Chinese government's failure to approve their requests is a violation of our Air Transport Agreement," the department said in a statement.

US air carriers had sharply reduced or suspended service to China amid the COVID-19 pandemic. United Airlines and Delta Air Lines submitted applications at the beginning of May to resume flights but have been unable to receive authorization from Civil Aviation Authority of China (CAAC), the DOT said.

The latest spat between Washington and Beijing centers partially on the CAAC deciding to determine the flight limit for foreign airlines

based on their activity as of March 12.

But US carriers had suspended all flights by that date due to the pandemic—meaning their cap was calculated to be zero—while Chinese-flagged flights continued.

The "arbitrary 'baseline' date... effectively precludes US carriers from reinstating scheduled passenger flights to and from China," the US order says. The department also said there are indications Chinese airlines are using charter flights to get around the limit of one flight a week to increase their advantage over US carriers.

"Our overriding goal is not the perpetuation of this situation, but rather an improved environment wherein the carriers of both parties will be able to exercise fully their bilateral rights," the order said.

### Downgrade for American

In early January 2020, before the pandemic struck, US and Chinese carriers operated approximately 325 weekly flights between the two countries.

"We support and appreciate the US government's actions to enforce our rights and ensure fairness," Delta spokesperson Lisa Hanna said. And Katherine Estep of industry trade group Airlines for America said the order should "ensure fair and equal opportunity for passenger airlines with respect to service to and from China."

Airline shares jump on Wall Street, with



**LOS ANGELES:** In this file photo, a family watches a China Airlines plane landing at LAX airport at the start of the Memorial Day holiday weekend in Los Angeles.—AFP

United gaining 12.5 percent in an upbeat market.

Meanwhile, China yesterday said foreign airlines blocked from operating in the country over virus fears would be allowed to resume limited flights, lifting a de facto ban on US carriers, a day after Washington ordered the suspension of all Chinese travel into and out of the US.

The apparent decision to step back by Beijing comes as tensions between the world's two

superpowers are sent soaring by a series of issues including Donald Trump's accusations over China's handling of the pandemic, Hong Kong and Huawei.

The latest spat was rooted in the Civil Aviation Authority of China (CAAC) deciding to impose a limit on foreign airlines based on their activity as of March 12. Because US carriers had suspended all flights by that date their cap was set at zero, while Chinese carriers' flights to the US continued. —Agencies

## Robot dog hounds Thai shoppers to keep hands virus-free

**BANGKOK:** A scurrying robot dog named K9 dispenses hand sanitizer to curious children and wary shoppers—one of the more unexpected measures Thai malls are taking as the kingdom relaxes virus restrictions.

The hi-tech hound is controlled using 5G, a technology promising super-fast internet speeds with immediate reaction times that is still in the initial stages of roll out in Thailand. Mimicking an excited puppy, K9 roams around the popular Central World mall in downtown Bangkok, drawing the attention of delighted children eager to get gel from a bottle attached to its back.

"It's convenient for people to wash their hands, just like a preventive measure... especially in this COVID-19 situation," said Petra Saktidejbanubandh, a marketing officer for mobile operator Advanced Info Services (AIS). AIS is aiming to roll out a 5G network for smartphones by the end of the year.

K9's 5G-powered comrades include ROC, which checks temperatures, and LISA, a customer service-bot.

"For K9 especially, people just think it's really cute," Petra told AFP, adding they hope to dispel any fiction-fueled fear of a robot takeover.



**BANGKOK:** A 5G K9 robot distributes hand sanitizer to visitors in a shopping mall in Bangkok yesterday.—AFP

"The robots are here to assist people, not to replace them." But shopper Lapassanan Buranapatpakorn was unconvinced, saying that she found K9's skeletal mechanical frame "creepy". "I think the execution, like the robot itself, is a bit scary," the 29-year-old said, though she admitted that giving out hand sanitizer is a "good idea". Thailand has gradually lifted restriction on businesses, which have taken precautions such as seating customers apart in restaurants or erecting plastic dividers in massage parlors. The kingdom currently has 3,101 confirmed cases of the virus and 58 deaths. —AFP

## Knife attack in Chinese primary school wounds 39

**BEIJING:** A knife-wielding attacker wounded 37 students and two adults at a primary school in southern China yesterday, officials said, with local media identifying a security guard as the perpetrator. All the victims, including teaching staff, were sent to hospital but were not in a life-threatening condition, authorities in Cangwu County, Guangxi region, said. The incident at the Wangfu Central Primary School happened at 8:30 am when children would normally arrive for class. The attacker, reportedly aged around 50, was "under control", the government said.

"37 students suffered mild injuries and two adults suffered more severe injuries. All of them were sent to a hospital for treatment, and none of their lives are in danger," it said. Schools in the region had only reopened in May after being closed for months due to the coronavirus outbreak. —AFP