

AirAsia cancels 'rescue' flight from KL to London
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Malaysian low-cost carrier AirAsia X Tuesday cancelled a "rescue" flight to London, leaving scores of passengers stranded by a volcano's disruption of air traffic across Europe.

More than 100 passengers had hoped to board AirAsia X's special "rescue" flight from Kuala Lumpur to London's Stansted, which had been arranged after the airline's April 15 cancellation of scheduled flights.

However, the rescue flight, scheduled depart at 2pm local time (0600 GMT), was aborted following new eruptions of the Icelandic volcano, to the dismay of tired passengers, according to an airline spokesman.

AirAsia X spokesman Nazatul Ekma Mokhtar confirmed the cancellation, adding that "I can't tell when we will launch the (rescue) flight" again.

Many passengers were sitting or lying down in corners at Kuala Lumpur International Airport's low-cost terminal, jumping up to queue whenever an announcement was made.

"They keep cancelling the flights. Our flight now leaves on April 30. I have to now try and trawl the Internet for extra flights," said Gerard Major, 50, a drama teacher at Ballantine High School in Ilford, east London.

"It is like being consigned to float in limbo," he said, at the end of a two-week holiday in Malaysia.

For others, the delay has been expensive, with extra costs incurred for hotel rooms and travel to and from the airport, and with some travellers fearing they would run out of cash.

Tourist Julien St.John-Dennis, 47, from Camberley, Sussex, who was in transit from Bali to London with his family, has been stuck in Malaysia since Saturday and has spent 600 pounds (918 dollars) so far on hotels and food.

"The British government really needs to do more to help its citizens stranded overseas," he told AFP.

"If (British Prime Minister) Gordon Brown wants to improve his standing in the general elections, he should show some leadership on this. Get us home and you have our vote."

The cancellation of European flights brought following Wednesday's eruption of the Iceland volcano has also affected students and teachers returning from Easter holidays to at least one international school in Malaysia.

The Alice Smith School said six of the 60 teachers at its primary section were still stuck overseas "as a result of the ash situation."

"Thirty children have also not been able to return," Alison Nadarajah, the school's primary section deputy head, told AFP. The new term began on Monday.

- AFP

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