Chaos as Indian domestic flights resume

Little seemed clear to either passengers or airport staff as domestic flights resumed after two months of shutdown.

While many flights took off, others were cancelled; Maharashtra state allowed only 50 flights per day, a decision that led to several cancellations.

Passengers were met with long lines and often no information as they arrived to find their flights no longer existed. Many people stuck in place who thought they could finally get home were doubly disappointed as they did not learn of the cancellations ahead of time.

Departure schedules were also mixed up, according to passenger reports.

Preventative measures

New preventative measures in place at airports include temperature checking and the disinfecting of shoes and luggage, and the government is also strongly encouraging passengers to download a controversial contact-tracing app that displays a green badge if your risk of COVID-19 contract is low.

While it's unclear currently if the app is required in order to board a plane the guidelines set forth by the Airports Authority of India, a federal government body that runs over 100 airports in the country — require all passengers to "compulsorily be registered with 'Aarogya Setu' app on their mobiles."

For days ahead of the May 25th reopening of domestic travel in the country, all travellers were reminded often to download this app before arriving at the station or airport.

How compulsory is it?

Passengers who do not have a smartphone, or possibly those who refuse to download the app — though this is unclear — must submit a self-declaration stating they aren't showing any COVID-19 symptoms and haven't tested positive in the last two months. Workers at the airports and passengers alike don't seem to be clear on whether the app is mandatory, and this creates even more chaos in an already chaotic situation.

Some employers and some jurisdictions are making the app compulsory. Dozens of cities and universities across the country have made downloading the app necessary, in some cases at risk of jail time for those who do not comply.

Compromised right to privacy

The movement tracing aspect of the app compromises a passenger's right to privacy, however, and so some Indians are finding workarounds such as cutting the app's GPS permissions and making it always display a green badge.

The majority of travelling Indians seem to feel downloading the app is far easier than fighting it, which is undoubtedly the decision the government is trying to force everyone to make.