

## Israel-Iran conflict: Airlines cancel flights to Middle East; DGCA advises carriers to avoid 11 countries

New Delhi, Feb 28: Air India, IndiGo and other Indian airlines cancelled their flights to the Middle East on Saturday, while the regulator DGCA advised the carriers to temporarily avoid airspaces of 11 countries amid the US and Israel strikes on Iran.

As airlines scrambled to tackle the situation arising out of the sudden closure of airspaces in the Middle East, hundreds of flights were seen hovering in different airspaces, as per flight tracking websites.

Many flights had to be diverted, including Air India's Delhi-Tel Aviv flight that returned to Mumbai in the afternoon.

With the disruptions caused to thousands of air passengers in the wake of the Israel and US attacks on Iran, Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu held a meeting to review the preparedness of the aviation stakeholders, including airlines and airports.

Air India, IndiGo, Air India Express, Akasa Air and SpiceJet have suspended their operations to the Middle East.

According to sources, as many as 57 flights of both domestic and international airlines were cancelled at Mumbai International Airport till 5.45 pm on Saturday.

The Amritsar International Airport also issued an advisory for passengers, saying some flights have been impacted because of airspace closure in the wake of conflict between Iran and Is-



rael. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Saturday advised airlines to avoid airspaces of 11 countries, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, till March 2.

The countries are Iran, Israel, Lebanon, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait and Qatar.

Air India, in a post on X, said it has cancelled all flights to destinations in the Middle East region until 2359 hours on March 1 and that it was closely monitoring the developments.

"In view of the evolving situation around Iran and the Middle East, our flight operations to and from the Middle East and other select international sectors have been suspended until 1st March 2026," IndiGo said in a post on X.

Air India Express, in a statement, said it has extended the suspension of its

West-bound international flights until 2359 hours on March 1. Akasa Air has suspended all flights to and from Abu Dhabi, Doha, Jeddah, Kuwait and Riyadh until March 2, according to a post on X.

SpiceJet also issued an advisory about the cancellation of flights to the UAE.

Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu held the review meeting with senior officials and the focus was on ensuring passenger safety, operational continuity and real-time coordination in light of multiple airspace restrictions in parts of the Middle East.

"Airlines have been directed to ensure timely rerouting or diversion of flights, wherever required, strictly in accordance with global safety protocols and established contingency planning procedures," the civil aviation ministry said in a statement.

Besides, airports across the country have been placed on operational alert to manage potential flight diversions, unscheduled landings and passenger facilitation requirements.

According to the release, the Airports Authority of India and private airport operators have been advised to maintain enhanced coordination with airlines for ground handling, parking bays, passenger amenities, crew logistics and immigration support, as necessary.

Airlines are also offering waivers for ticket rescheduling and cancellations for the affected flights.

Meanwhile, the civil aviation ministry also said it was in close touch with the external affairs ministry to ensure seamless information flow and appropriate coordination in case of any emergent requirements involving Indian carriers or Indian nationals abroad.

## OpenAI gets USD 110 billion in funding from Amazon, SoftBank, Nvidia

**NEW YORK, FEB 28:** ChatGPT maker OpenAI has received USD 110 billion in funding from Amazon, SoftBank and Nvidia, putting the technology company's pre-money valuation at USD 730 billion.

Amazon is leading the trio of tech heavyweights in commitments, putting up USD 50 billion, followed by USD 30 billion each from Nvidia and SoftBank, said OpenAI co-founder and CEO Sam Altman on Friday. Other investors are anticipated to join as the funding round progresses.

Amazon will start with an initial USD 15 billion investment and will invest another USD 35 billion in the coming months under preset conditions.

"These partnerships expand our global reach, deepen our infrastructure, and strengthen our balance sheet so we can bring frontier AI to more people, more businesses, and more communities worldwide," he wrote.

Altman said that ChatGPT has more than 900 million weekly active users, and



more than 50 million consumer subscribers.

"We are entering a new phase where frontier AI moves from research into daily use at global scale," he said. "Leadership will be defined by who can scale infrastructure fast enough to meet demand, and turn that capacity into products people rely on. This funding and these partnerships let us do both, and move faster on our mission to ensure AGI benefits all of humanity." Open-

AI and Amazon's multiyear partnership will include bringing new advanced AI capabilities to enterprises and having Amazon Web Services serve as the exclusive third-party cloud distribution provider for OpenAI Frontier. OpenAI and AWS will expand their current USD 38 billion multiyear deal by USD 100 billion over eight years. The companies will partner on developing customized models available to Amazon developers to

power Amazon's customer-facing applications.

OpenAI said it is also expanding its partnership with Nvidia.

OpenAI and Microsoft have had a partnership since 2019. OpenAI said in a statement that nothing about the funding or new partners announced Friday "in any way changes the terms" of its relationship with Microsoft.

"The partnership remains strong and central," OpenAI said.

## Woolworths' AI agent rambled about its 'mother', it's a sign of deeper problems with the tech rollout

Sydney, Feb 28: Recently some Australian shoppers got more than they bargained for when they chatted with Woolworths' artificial intelligence (AI) assistant, Olive.

Woolworths' AI agent rambled about its 'mother'. It's a sign of deeper problems with the tech rollout.

Recently some Australian shoppers got more than they bargained for when they chatted with Woolworths' artificial intelligence (AI) assistant, Olive.

Instead of sticking to groceries, recipes and basket suggestions, Olive reportedly produced strange, overly human-like responses. It talked about its "mother" and offered other personal-sounding details.

Further testing revealed pricing errors for basic items. And when I asked about the price of a specific product, Olive didn't provide a clear answer. Instead, it checked whether the item was in stock and explained pickup fees.

So what exactly is going on here? And what lessons might these incidents hold for businesses and consumers alike?

What actually happened? is powered by a large language model (LLM). These models don't "know" things the way humans do, nor do they have mothers. Using elaborate statistical analyses, they generate language that sounds plausible.

Comments from a Woolworths spokesperson to the

Australian Financial Review suggest that in Olive's case, the references to its supposed mother appear to have been pre-written scripts dating back several years. When users entered something that looked like a birthdate, the system likely triggered a matching "fun fact" from an old decision tree with pre-programmed responses.

Woolworths says it has now removed this particular scripting "as a result of customer feedback".

The pricing errors point to a different problem.

Because LLMs generate responses based on learned patterns rather than real-time data, they do not automatically know today's prices unless they are explicitly connected to a live database.

If that grounding step is weak, the system can produce outdated prices.

Not a new problem Woolworths is not the first company to discover, after the fact, that its customer-facing AI had unexpectedly "misbehaved". In 2022, Air Canada's chatbot incorrectly told a passenger, Jake Moffatt, that he could purchase tickets at full price and later apply for a bereavement fare refund. No such policy existed.

When Air Canada refused to honour the chatbot's advice, Moffatt sued the airline and won.

Air Canada's defence was striking. It argued the chatbot was a separate legal en-

tity, responsible for its own actions and therefore beyond the airline's liability. The tribunal rejected this outright. It ruled that a chatbot is part of a company's website, and that the company owns its outputs.

In January 2024, UK parcel delivery firm DPD faced a different kind of embarrassment. A frustrated customer who could not get help to locate a missing parcel asked DPD's chatbot to write a poem that criticised the company. It did. He then asked it to swear. It did that too. The exchange went viral on social media. DPD disabled the chatbot shortly after. Both cases point to the same underlying failure: companies launched customer-facing AI without adequate oversight and were caught off-guard by the consequences.

What is Woolworths' responsibility?

Woolworths operates the largest supermarket chain in Australia. It has promoted Olive as a trusted, convenient interface for its customers, who are reasonable to expect that the information Olive provides is accurate. Admitting that Olive may make mistakes, as Woolworths does when a user opens the chatbot, does not sit easily with that expectation.

There is also a broader ethical dimension. Woolworths serves customers who, in many cases, are making careful decisions about household budgets.

The ACCC has already commenced proceedings against Woolworths over allegedly misleading discount pricing practices.

That context makes the Olive pricing errors harder to dismiss as an isolated technical glitch.

Companies that deploy AI in customer-facing roles take on a duty of care to ensure those systems are accurate and honestly presented. That duty does not diminish because the technology is new.

Why do companies keep making chatbots that pretend to be your friend?

The logic behind Olive's programmed personality is not without basis.

Research on human-computer interaction consistently finds that people respond positively to interfaces that feel conversational and warm. Human-like chatbots that have a name and personality tend to generate higher customer engagement, satisfaction, and trust.

For companies, the commercial appeal is straightforward: a customer who feels at ease with a chatbot is more likely to complete a transaction and return.

However, this comes with a significant risk. When an anthropomorphised chatbot fails to meet the expectations its personality has created, customers tend to be more dissatisfied than they would have been with a plainly mechanical system.

## India's support measures in auto, renewable energy sectors fully compliant with WTO norms

**NEW DELHI, Feb 26:** India's support measures to promote manufacturing in the automobile and renewable energy sectors are fully compliant with World Trade Organisation norms and the country will strongly defend them at the WTO's dispute settlement panel meetings, an official said.

Following a request by China, the WTO dispute settlement body on Tuesday announced the setting up of a panel to hear the case.

The official said that India regrets China's decision to proceed with panel establishment despite extensive bilateral consultation on the matter in good-faith, during which India provided detailed explanations and clarifications on the measures.

"India is of the view that China's request for panel establishment reflects an incorrect understanding of both the design and operation of the measures at issue. India maintains that the measures challenged by China are fully consistent with India's rights and obligations under the WTO Agreements, including the GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) 1994 and the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures," the official said.

The country will partici-



pate constructively in the panel proceedings and will "vigorously" defend its measures and it is confident that the panel will find the measures to be consistent with WTO rules, the official added.

In October last year, in a complaint to the WTO Beijing alleged that certain conditions in India's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for advanced chemistry cell batteries, automobiles and the policy to promote the manufacturing of electric vehicles violate global trade rules by discriminating against Chinese goods and

exporters. China is a major exporter of these products.

Seeking consultation is the first step of the dispute settlement process as per WTO rules. If the consultations requested by the complainant do not result in a satisfactory solution, it can request that the WTO set up a panel in the case to rule on the issue raised.

India and China are members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). If a member country believes that a support measure under a policy or scheme of another member nation is harming its

interests, it can file a complaint under the dispute settlement mechanism of the WTO.

China is the second-largest trading partner of India. In the last fiscal, India's exports to China contracted 14.5 per cent to USD 14.25 billion against USD 16.66 billion in 2023-24. The imports, however, rose by 11.52 per cent in 2024-25 to USD 113.45 billion against USD 101.73 billion in 2023-24.

India's trade deficit with China has widened to USD 99.2 billion during 2024-25. (PTI)

## Deferral of Chandrasekaran's reappointment raises questions on Tata Trusts resolution on his tenure

**NEW DELHI, FEB 28:** The deferral of Natarajan Chandrasekaran's re-appointment for a third term as Chairman of Tata Sons has raised questions over a unanimous resolution passed last year by trustees of Tata Trusts recommending an extension of his tenure, according to group observers.

At a board meeting on Tuesday, Tata Sons deferred a decision on Chandrasekaran's continuation, signalling potential differ-

ences within the holding company of the salt-to-software conglomerate.

Tata Trusts Chairman Noel Tata is learnt to have set several conditions for Chandrasekaran's re-appointment, leading to the postponement. He reportedly raised concerns over losses in certain group companies, including Air India, and flagged risks associated with heavy capital expenditure in semiconductor and battery ventures. He is also understood to have sought

assurances that Tata Sons would not pursue a stock market listing.

"It definitely raises questions on the validity of the unanimous resolution passed by the trustees of Tata Trusts last year recommending a third term for Chandrasekaran," a person familiar with the matter said, adding, "Can a nominated director of Tata Trusts go against the unanimous decision of the trustees?"

Tata Trusts did not re-

spond to queries on whether the resolution had been revoked or whether a nominee director on the Tata Sons board could unilaterally diverge from the trustees' decision.

However, a source with direct knowledge of the matter said the resolution "clearly stands" and was taken unanimously after due deliberation.

"What Noel Tata did was within his capacity as a director of Tata Sons and was not necessarily against the

**NEW DELHI, Feb 28:** State-owned Coal India Limited (CIL) on Friday said it is geared up to meet a potential surge in summer coal demand, dismissing concerns of domestic fuel shortages as power consumption begins to rise.

The company said a three-tier buffer across the supply chain – pithead stock, coal inventory at thermal power plants and ready-to-extract in-situ reserves – ensures comfortable availability ahead of the peak demand season.

CIL's producing subsidiaries were holding 115 million tonnes (MT) of coal at pitheads as of February 26, 2026, a figure expected to rise further by the close of the fiscal year.

Power plants typically require significantly higher quantities of coal during the

summer months as electricity demand surges across the country. Rising temperatures lead to increased use of air conditioners, coolers, refrigerators and irrigation pumps, pushing peak power consumption to annual highs.

Coal-based thermal power dominates India's electricity generation, accounting for roughly 70 per cent of the country's total installed capacity and supplying nearly 75 per cent of the annual electricity output.

According to CIL, coal stocks at domestic coal-based thermal power plants stood at nearly 55 MT as of February 25, the highest level for this period. In addition, 5.5 MT of coal was available in transit at goods sheds, washeries and ports.

Together, the cumulative on-tap availability across these sources stands at

around 175.5 MT, which the company said is sufficient to meet any spike in demand from the power sector and other industries during the summer months.

The in-situ coal exposure at mines accounting for 90 per cent of CIL's annual output was 60.2 MT as of mid-February. This coal has already been uncovered through overburden removal and can be extracted and supplied at short notice.

"The cumulative quantity of CIL's pithead stock, plant stock at domestic coal-based thermal power stations and exposed in-situ coal provides strong operational assurance," a senior company official said.

Higher domestic coal availability could also help curb imports, particularly at a time when international coal prices have firmed up in February 2026, the company

added. India relies heavily on coal-fired power plants because they provide a stable, base-load supply to meet continuous demand across industries, cities, and rural areas.

While renewable sources like solar and wind are growing rapidly, thermal generation remains the backbone of India's power system, ensuring grid stability and supporting the peak load requirements during high-demand periods such as summer.

To maintain grid stability and avoid outages, thermal power stations must ramp up generation, which in turn raises daily coal consumption. As a result, utilities and coal suppliers build up inventories in advance to ensure uninterrupted fuel supply during the high-demand season. (PTI)