

Air France, United to run limited flights to India

India's civil aviation authority has signed agreements with Air France and United Airlines to operate a limited number of flights to India in an interim arrangement during the coronavirus pandemic until international commercial flights are fully resumed, an official said Thursday.

Air France will operate 28 flights linking Paris with New Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore between July 18 and Aug. 1, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Puri told reporters.

United Airlines will operate 18 flights connecting New Delhi with Newark and San Francisco between July 17 and 31, he said.

Lufthansa is also eager to operate flights, he said.

Similar arrangements are in place with airlines in the United Arab Emirates until Aug. 26, Civil Aviation Ministry spokesman Rajiv Jain said.

"Unless the international civil aviation space reclaims its pre-COVID space, air bubbles (limited, regulated air move-

ments) are the only answer to international flights," Puri said.

The flights will be subject to conditions imposed by each country on the entry of travelers in view of the pandemic, he said.

India's state-run carrier, Air-India, has been operating limited flights to the United States, Europe, Gulf countries and several other nations since May to bring back hundreds of thousands of Indians stranded there and also carry home foreigners stuck in India. (AP)



In this file photo, Ethan Cale walks to the American Airlines ticket counter in Salt Lake City. (AP)

Business Plus



Country's economy likely to decline by more than 10% this year: IMF

Many Zimbabweans sell goods from their cars in hard times



People sell various goods by the side of a busy road in Harare, Zimbabwe, July 1. Cars have become mobile markets in Zimbabwe where enterprising residents are selling goods from their vehicles to cope with economic hardships caused by the coronavirus. With their car doors and trunks wide open by the side of busy roads, eager sellers display a colorful array of goods in Harare, the capital. (AP)

By Farai Mutsaka

Cars have become mobile markets in Zimbabwe where enterprising residents are selling goods from their vehicles to cope with economic hardships caused by the coronavirus.

With their car doors and trunks wide open by the side of busy roads, eager sellers display a colorful array of goods in Harare, the capital city.

In the trunk of a Mercedes, packets of rice, sugar and candies are neatly laid next to baby clothes, while blankets are displayed on the roof. The owner invites passersby to take a look, as his eyes dart sideways, on the lookout for police. Such unlicensed street vending is illegal and police have made a few arrests, but not enough to discourage the widespread practice.

Shelton Marange worked as a

mechanic before he was laid off in May. Nowadays, he braves the southern hemisphere's chilly winter weather and the risk of arrest or contracting coronavirus to drive to a village 30 kilometers (18 miles) away at dawn to buy vegetables from rural farmers. Then he heads back to Harare to resell the goods from the back of his small truck.

"These are my bolts, nuts, spanners these days," he said jokingly, pointing to cabbages, carrots, tomatoes, onions and potatoes packed in the back of the pickup. To beat the competition, many of whom stay in one spot, Marange moves around, selling his produce from spot to spot from morning until dusk.

Zimbabwe's economy was already in the doldrums before the coronavirus, beset by rising inflation, the declining value of the

local currency, high unemployment, and acute shortages of water, electricity and gas.

The country's economy is likely to decline by more than 10% this year, considerably more than the 3.2% contraction projected for the entire sub-Saharan Africa economy, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Unable to cope with the double burden of the economic decline and restrictions caused by the coronavirus, many of the few industries and companies still operating in Zimbabwe are either closing down or cutting jobs.

About 25% of jobs in the formal sector could be lost due to the contraction caused by COVID-19, according to the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce.

The figures could be even worse, said Peter Mutasa, president of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade

Unions, noting that even formally employed people such as civil servants earning less than \$50 a month are complementing their incomes by selling goods from their cars.

"Wages are now useless because of inflation," he said. "Everyone is crying."

Selling from cars is also prevalent in other parts of Africa.

Joseph Chege used to be an electronics dealer on the outskirts of Kenya's capital, Nairobi, but anti-COVID-19 restrictions forced him to close his business. Faced with payments for loans he had taken to expand his now-shut business, Chege says he had to come up with a quick alternative to meet his financial obligations.

He realized that demand for food had remained the same but there was a shortfall in supply in Nairobi because of movement restrictions.

He also realized that the farmers in his community were not able to sell their produce because the local market had been closed by a ban on crowded places.

Chege went around farms and bought the best produce at the cheapest price and then drove to the populated neighborhoods in Nairobi, parked his car, and opened the trunk to display the fresh produce.

"It did not take long and before lunch-time I was out of stock, so I drove back and got more produce," he said.

Chege says that the profit from selling vegetables and fruits is significantly less than what he used to make but he is grateful to be able to meet some of his financial obligations when many people are losing their livelihoods. Although Kenya has now lifted travel restrictions, Chege says the economic downturn will prevent him from returning to his electronics business for a while yet.

In Zimbabwe, selling items from the back of car trunks to beat economic hardships is not completely new, but it was mainly limited to those selling second-hand clothes.

Now, newly unemployed people clog roadsides and street corners in both rich and poor suburbs in Harare to sell from their cars.

Many said the items for sale are smuggled from neighboring South Africa, which has closed its border posts with Zimbabwe as part of lockdown measures.

Zimbabwe's economy had already shifted from full-time, salaried jobs to self-employed trading due to a steady trend of de-industrialization over the past two decades, and the coronavirus has just worsened the situation, said some economists.

"We have seen the closure of companies, the closure of industries. We have seen more and more people actually eking out a living in the informal sector," said Prosper Chitambaro, a Harare-based economist.

For Marshall Chinyani, who abandoned work as a schoolteacher three years ago to focus on a small import business that closed due to the coronavirus, selling from his car is the new normal.

"I am here because of the coronavirus pandemic that forced some of us to leave our jobs (and go) into the streets to sell these," he said, standing next to his car packed with vegetables on the side of a busy road in Belgravia, a Harare suburb with many embassies, U.N. agencies and international aid organizations.

"We were never used to this," he said. "But we were forced to leave our offices and our shops." (AP)

Future of biggest shopping discount day unknown amid COVID-19

Black Friday shopping could look different this year

By Courtney Jespersen
NerdWallet

Doors bursting open at stores. Crowds spilling into the aisles. Elbows brushing up against others. Products flying off shelves. These are the hallmark images of Black Friday.

Well, they were.

That was before the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the nation. Now, the future of the biggest shopping discount day of the year is unknown.

Yes, it will still happen

For many, shopping on the day after Thanksgiving is a tradition. Historically, it's also one of the best days of the year to save money on big-ticket items like electronics and appliances.

But with social distancing the norm, it's hard to imagine shoppers camping out on the sidewalk next to one another this year ahead of Nov. 27. It's even more difficult to picture stores overflowing with excited shoppers.

Retail experts believe Black Friday will still happen in 2020,

despite the pandemic. But there's no disputing the fact that it won't be a traditional experience.

"Being there at the crack of dawn, waiting in lines, the hustle and bustle in the store — that's probably not going to exist," says Jane Boyd Thomas, a professor of marketing at Winthrop University in South Carolina who has done research about Black Friday.

Sales will shift further online

For years, Black Friday has shifted to online channels, merging with Cyber Monday into a weekend-long event. The pandemic is set to further cement that transition.

After months of shelter-in-place orders, consumers have become more comfortable shopping from home. That will likely lead to an increase in online Black Friday purchases this year, says Dora Bock, associate professor of marketing at the Harbert College of Business at Auburn University in Alabama.

But the changes could go a step beyond that. COVID-19 has illuminated failings in the supply

chain, and Thomas believes many consumers will opt for contactless curbside pickup options (as opposed to shipping to their home) to guarantee that the items they're buying online are actually available — and not out of stock.

Still, that doesn't necessarily mean stores will be ghost towns. "They want something normal," Thomas says of some shoppers. "I do think that will drive people to go in to see the lights, to see the trees — all the stuff that goes with that experience."

Doorbusters could be deep

Even though the experience will look different, Black Friday discounts might be particularly relevant this year, especially as millions of Americans have faced unemployment and other financial hardships in 2020.

While consumers have largely focused on purchasing essential items during the pandemic, Bock anticipates competitive prices on discretionary products like apparel and jewelry.

Consumers might also have an appetite for traditional Black Fri-

day categories, such as computers. Thomas expects these discounts will be appealing, considering how critical laptops have become as Americans work, learn and interact virtually from home.

"There's a large number of consumers that look forward to Black Friday because it provides them a sense of excitement," Bock says. "People feel good when they get a good deal."

Retailers still have some planning to do

There are a number of unanswered questions about how Black Friday will look. After all, retailers are still figuring out how to market the holiday shopping season.

One possibility? Black Friday may become an extended period, rather than a single day of sales, says Michael Brown, a partner in the consumer practice of Kearney, a global strategy and management consultant.

"I'm expecting that Black Friday as we have grown to know it cannot exist in a COVID world," Brown says.

"I think we have to really not think about Black Friday and think more about when the launch of the holiday season will begin. I think that has to be pulled up by retailers as early as November 1," he says.

Throughout the holiday season, stores will have to perform a delicate dance. Shopping may become just as much about public health as it is about discounts.

Retailers have merchandise to sell, but promoting in-store only specials could be seen as insensitive by shoppers with preexisting medical conditions, Bock points out.

"I think it's really going to be a balancing act for retailers to encourage sales, encourage people to buy, encourage trust and promote spending — but promote it in a way that shows they care for their customers' well-being," Bock says.

There's one more wild card, Brown says. What type of Black Friday shopping environment will state and local governments allow? Time will tell. (AP)

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