

Coronavirus crisis: focus on business

EasyJet to resume flights in June with focus on UK

By **Simon Foy**

EASYJET planes will take off again next month with masked passengers and crew as the budget carrier joins rivals across Europe in a gradual restart of operations.

The airline is to relaunch routes on June 15 where it believes there is enough demand to turn a profit, with a small number of aircraft and a schedule focused on domestic flights in the UK and France. More flights will be added as lockdown measures are eased across Europe, the company said.

EasyJet's planes have been grounded since March when the coronavirus pandemic took hold. The announcement comes after rival Ryanair last week said it will return two fifths of its normal flight schedule from July.

EasyJet said flights would restart with new health and safety measures, including passengers and cabin crew being required to wear face masks, and enhanced cleaning of aircraft. Initially, there will also be no on-board food service to limit interactions.

Ryanair, Lufthansa and Air France-KLM have already made masks compulsory in a bid to reassure customers

that flying is safe. Investors were reassured by the easyJet announcement, with the company's shares rising 4.5pc to 575p in early trading.

Johan Lundgren, easyJet's chief executive, said: "These are small and carefully planned steps that we are taking to gradually resume operations.

"We will continue to closely monitor the situation across Europe so that when more restrictions are lifted the schedule will continue to build over time to match demand, while also ensuring we are operating efficiently and on routes that our customers want."

Alexander Paterson, an analyst at Peel Hunt, said: "Domestic routes represented only a small proportion of easyJet's pre-Covid-19 network so this is only a small step forward, but with lockdown measures being relaxed in Europe, the network should recover swiftly over July and August."

The airline is to announce the results of a shareholder vote today on whether to remove four directors from the board, including the chief executive and chairman.

The ballot was brought by its founder and biggest investor, **Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou**, in a row over a £4.5bn order of 107 Airbus planes. The Greek-Cypriot billionaire has been a long-



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standing critic of easyJet's expansion plans and wants the deal scrapped.

He has called easyJet bosses "scoundrels" for refusing to back down to his demands. However, Sir Stelios is facing a struggle to oust the board members, according to the airline's boss.

Mr Lundgren said last week he had spoken to almost half of the airline's investors, all of whom had given the board their backing.

On Tuesday, easyJet revealed it had fallen victim to a "highly sophisticated" cyber attack that exposed the email addresses and travel details of nine million customers and was reportedly the work of Chinese hackers.

The firm said it did not believe any personal information had been misused, but admitted that the credit card details of more than 2,000 passengers had been stolen.

Cash swoop Lufthansa in talks over state bailout

German flag carrier Lufthansa is in advanced talks over a €9bn (£8bn) state bailout as countries battle to save an aviation industry hammered by the coronavirus pandemic. The nation's taxpayers will get a 20pc stake in the airline if the rescue goes ahead, and the government will take two seats

on its supervisory board. Berlin would only exercise its voting rights in exceptional circumstances, such as to protect against a takeover. Rivals such as Air France-KLM and US carriers such as American Airlines have also sought state aid. Lufthansa says it hopes the deal will be signed quickly.

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