

Thousands of trekkers stuck on Everest

More than 1,000 foreign trekkers are stranded in the foothills of Mount Everest because bad weather has not allowed planes to take off or land at the area's only airport. Police official Ramesh Khakda said about 1,200 foreign trekkers are now stranded around Tenzing-Hillary Airport in Lukla, Nepal.

Floods threaten Thai subway

Thailand's record floods encroached deeper into Bangkok yesterday, swamping a major road junction in the northern edge of the city centre and threatening the subway system.

The water from the country's worst flooding in more than half a century was filling Bangkok's Lad Phrao intersection, where three major roads meet.

Israelis tackle protest boats

Israeli forces have boarded protest boats trying to break its naval blockade of Gaza, the military said. It said the boats would be towed to the Israeli port of Ashdod.

More miners rescued

Rescuers pulled 42 more miners to the surface today and are searching for several more who were trapped after a cave-in at a mine in the city of Samenxia in Henan province, China. Seven other miners were rescued yesterday. Four were killed.

# Spacemen home after 520-day 'mission' to Mars

AN INTERNATIONAL crew of researchers have emerged from a gruelling 520-day simulation of a flight to Mars. Pale but smiling, the all-male crew of three Russians, a Frenchman, an Italian-Colombian and a Chinese walked out of a set of windowless modules in Moscow. The facility simulated the confinement, stress and fatigue of interplanetary

travel - minus the weightlessness. Dressed in blue tracksuits emblazoned with the mission emblem, they carefully walked down a metal ladder to a greeting crowd of officials and journalists. "The crew has completed the experiment," team leader Alexey Sitev reported to Russian space officials. "The mission is accomplished, the crew is in good health and is ready for new missions."



Researchers test space suits on simulated Mars surface

Psychologists said long confinement put the team members under stress as they grew increasingly tired of each other's company. They said that psychological conditions can even be more challenging on a mock mission than a real flight because the crew will not experience any of the euphoria or dangers of actual space travel.



BACK TO REALITY: The 'space crew' see the sky for the first time in 520 days after their 'mission' to Mars

Despite that, the crew showed no sign of stress as they walked to microphones to speak before cameras. "We hope that we can help in designing the future missions to Mars," Frenchman Romain Charles said. The crew communicated with the organisers and their families via the internet, which was delayed and occasionally disrupted to imitate the effects of space travel. Each crew member will be paid about £60,000, except

the Chinese researcher whose reward has not been revealed by Chinese officials. A flight to Mars is decades away because of huge costs and technological challenges, particularly the task of creating a compact and relatively lightweight shield that will protect the crew from deadly space radiation. The American space agency Nasa is aiming for a nearby asteroid around 2025 and then on to Mars in the 2030s.

## Shootings unravel Syrian peace plan

A SYRIAN peace plan brokered by the Arab League unravelled yesterday as security forces killed 15 people, opening fire on thousands of protesters who denounced President Bashar Assad and said he never intended to hold up his end of the deal to end the violence.

The bloodshed, only two days after Syria agreed to the deal, suggests Damascus is unwilling - or unable - to put a swift end to a crackdown that has already killed 3,000 people since the uprising began in March.

"This regime is not serious about ending its brutal crackdown," said Mustafa Osso, a Syria-based human rights lawyer.

The crisis in Syria has burned for nearly eight months despite widespread condemnation and international sanctions, and the protesters have grown increasingly frustrated with the limits of their peaceful movement.

Some protesters are even calling for the kind of foreign military action that helped topple Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

But Nato has ruled out any plans for Syria, and Assad still has a firm grip on power. Tremors from the unrest in Syria could shake the region.

The 15 people were killed mostly in Homs and the suburbs of Damascus.

## Firebombed paper vows to publish

A SATIRICAL French weekly newspaper whose offices were firebombed has released more print copies of the controversial edition which was "guest edited" by

the Prophet Mohammed. News stands had sold out of the special edition.

Charlie Hebdo has started a blog since its website and Facebook page are inaccessible.

No one was injured in the attack and the protests so far have been limited to the web, but there are concerns that the spoof could trigger a wave of violent demonstrations.

The paper's offices were destroyed early on Wednesday just hours before the edition appeared. Employees are now working from the offices of French daily Liberation.

# BUSINESS

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## Fears over 'vital' Heathrow links



AIRLINE BUYOUT: Willie Walsh... said IAG would use BMI to expand its long-haul network

BY KEITH FINDLAY

FEARS over the future of air links between Aberdeen and London re-ignited yesterday after British Airways' owner said it was taking over BMI. Both BA and its rival run services between Aberdeen and Heathrow and the news that International Airlines Group (IAG), BA's parent, is buying BMI raises questions over the likelihood of these being maintained at their current level.

BMI's Aberdeen-Heathrow service was in danger of being axed even before yesterday's announcement, according to industry sources. Flights between the Granite City and Heathrow, vital for north-east businesses, have been at the heart of many campaigns over the years amid perceived threats to the route.

Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce chief executive Bob Collier said: "The north-east depends on good air connectivity to London Heathrow and onwards to global markets. There is no other effective means of travel for business."

"We would be very concerned if the takeover by BA of BMI led to fewer flights to Heathrow or higher fares." North-east public-private sector transport partnership Nestrans said: "It looks as if the two carriers currently operating the route will become one, which is disappointing. If the deal goes through, it could mean less choice and less frequency for passengers."

Nestrans added the move highlighted the need to protect landing slots for regional services at Heathrow, for which the group is leading a campaign.

BMI also has flights from Edinburgh to Heathrow, and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce (SCC) said it was very concerned about the impact the deal could have on Scottish air links overall.

SCC chief executive Liz Cameron said: "The fear is that BA's purchase of BMI will translate into fewer flights, limited competition, and increased costs to passengers."

Andrew Martin, of Robert Gordon University's Scottish centre for tourism, said: "Links to Heathrow for all communities are highly prized but the geographic location of Aberdeen and industries located here make the need more compelling."

"However, IAG is unlikely to be swayed by a social responsibility and there is little doubt there could be a temptation to use the Aberdeen Heathrow slots for other routes."

Angus MacNeil, the SNP's Westminster spokesman for transport said he would raise concerns with the regulator because BA would have a monopoly of routes between Heathrow and Scotland.

BMI parent Lufthansa decided to sell after attempts to turn around the loss-making airline proved fruitless.

BA chief executive Willie Walsh said he did not see any regulatory issues arising, even though IAG would control 53% of takeover and landing slots at Heathrow. He said IAG would use BMI to expand its long-haul network, especially into the fast-growing economies of Asia and Latin America.

IAG envisaged that the deal could be signed in the first quarter of next year.

A spokeswoman said it was too early to say what the impact would be on the Scottish routes but insisted BA was committed to strengthening its regional network.

BMI's Aberdeen-based regional business, which operates flights from the north-east to Norwich, Manchester, Groningen and Esbjerg, is being sold to a Scottish consortium, thought to include former Business Air chief Ian Woodley.

Meanwhile, IAG said third-quarter profits were squeezed after fuel costs rose 23.7% in the three months to September and by 28.5% to £3.26billion over the year to date.

Revenue in the latest quarter was up by 2.2% to £3.9billion, with operating profits down some 34% year-on-year at £305million.

### Expert view: Aberdeen-London a struggle for BMI

BY JOHN STRICKLAND

THE news British Airways parent IAG is to buy BMI, subject to any regulatory blessing, will bring an era to an end.

In the early 1980s, British Midland brought new, sharp competition to BA's Edinburgh and Glasgow to Heathrow services and Aberdeen came later.

BMI's sale reflects a very different landscape in 2011, when it is very difficult for full-service airlines to make money on short-haul flights.

Low-cost carriers have made this their own profitable arena by using a different business model

based on lower fares and in the case of Scotland, using other London airports, and customers have voted with their feet.

BMI has struggled in the Aberdeen-London market and cut back both frequency and capacity on the Heathrow route in recent years.

Aberdeen-London is a key route for BA, however, not least in providing feeder links onwards to many parts of its long-haul network; critical for the oil industry.

It is probable that capacity will be maintained at similar levels to those which exist today for BA, with maybe an oppor-

tunity to increase peak-time capacity. Overall, frequencies are likely to be less than are currently operated by the two carriers into Heathrow.

The reality is that merger or no merger, this route would have come under risk at some point sooner rather than later for BMI. At least now there is a high degree of certainty that Heathrow will continue to be served by BA, with low-cost carriers meeting additional demand into the other London area airports.

● Aviation expert John Strickland is an independent air transport consultant and director of JLS Consulting



### BEATRICE OFFSHORE WIND FARM PUBLIC INFORMATION EXHIBITIONS

Beatrice Offshore Windfarm Limited (BOWL) is a joint venture partnership between SSE Renewables and Repsol Nuevas Energias UK. BOWL is proposing to develop the Beatrice offshore wind farm which will be located in the Outer Moray Firth.

We will be submitting an application for consent to develop the site to Scottish Ministers before the end of January 2012. Ahead of this we are holding public information exhibitions to provide people with the opportunity to learn more about the proposals and raise any questions that they may have with our project team. The exhibitions will be held as follows:

| VENUE                                       | DATE                    | TIMES         |
|---|-------------------------|---------------|
| WICK<br>MACKAYS HOTEL, WICK                 | TUESDAY<br>8 NOVEMBER   | 13:00 - 19:00 |
| HELMSDALE<br>COMMUNITY CENTRE,<br>HELMSDALE | WEDNESDAY<br>9 NOVEMBER | 13:00 - 18:00 |
| BUCKIE<br>TOWN HOUSE HALL, BUCKIE           | THURSDAY<br>10 NOVEMBER | 13:00 - 19:00 |
| INVERNESS<br>EASTGATE CENTRE                | FRIDAY<br>11 NOVEMBER   | 09:00 - 17:00 |

We held earlier consultation exhibitions in summer 2010 and invited comments from members of the public. We are keen to hear peoples' views and therefore comment forms will also be available at the forthcoming exhibitions and can either be completed on the day, or posted at a later date to our Communications Manager -

Morven Smith, BOWL Communications Manager  
Inveralmond House, 200 Dunkeld Road, Perth PH1 3AQ  
Telephone - 01738 516650  
Email - morven.smith@sse.com

The closing date for comments to BOWL on the proposals is Friday 2 December. Further information on the proposals (including comments forms) can be obtained from our website www.sse.com/beatrice

The Press and Journal

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