

National News

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Delayed flights were among the factors that plagued outgoing CEO Jenifer Bamuturaki, ultimately contributing to her premature exit early this month.

BY BUSEIN SAMILU

Uganda Airlines cancelled two flights yesterday - one to Nigeria's capital, Lagos, at 7am, and another to London at 10am - raising red flags over the continuity of flight disruptions.

Officials from the airline, when contacted, declined to comment and instead referred this newspaper to the Friday, February 20 travel update, where clients had been informed about scheduled cancellations.

Ms Shakila Rahim, the head of Corporate Affairs at Uganda Airlines, said: "I refer you to the Notice which we posted on our socials..."

In the notice she referenced, the airline announced the cancellation of two Saturday flights: Flight UR 430 from Entebbe to Mumbai, India, scheduled to depart at 13:20 and arrive at 23 hours, and the return leg, Flight UR 431 from Mumbai to Entebbe, due to depart at 01:10 and arrive at 05:50.

The announcement of temporary disruptions followed the grounding of two of Uganda Airlines' long-haul A330neo jets, which operate routes to the UK, UAE, India, and Nigeria. Both aircraft were taken out of service for unscheduled maintenance.

The notice read: "Uganda Airlines wishes to inform our esteemed guests

Uganda Airlines hit again by flight delays

KEY PROBLEMS AT UGANDA AIRLINES

1. Leadership instability

- Frequent suspensions and sackings of top management and board members.
- Accusations of incompetence and lack of required qualifications for senior roles.

2. Governance and corruption

- Reports of nepotism, favouritism, and employing relatives.
- Inflated procurement costs and irregular contracts (e.g., fuel, uniforms, publicity).

- Collusion between board members and managers to manipulate invoices and profit from procurement.

3. Financial mismanagement

- Losses of Shs164.5 billion between FY2019/2020 and FY2020/2021.
- Airline collected only Shs48.6 billion out of a budgeted Shs304.6 billion.
- Payments made to service providers without following due process.
- Over Shs500 billion lost in three



Uganda Airlines' Bombardier. PHOTO/FILE

years with no recovery in sight.

4. Procurement irregularities

- 25 procurements outside the approved plan in FY2020/2021.
- Fuel supply deals through middlemen, leading to inflated costs.
- Questionable contracts with PR agencies and bloggers costing taxpayers millions.

5. Operational inefficiencies

- Poor record-keeping in engineering and stores, leading to asset accountability problems.
- Ticketing irregularities: over 900 tickets worth Shs982 million not

reflected in revenue.

- Reliance on external agencies selling tickets at inflated prices.

6. Scandals and probes

- COSASE and PAC investigations exposed mismanagement, incompetence, and irregular contracts.
- CID and State House Anti-Corruption Unit launched fresh probes into alleged embezzlement, abuse of office, and false accounting.
- Continuous flight delays and cancellations, which frustrate customers.

that two of our long-haul aircraft are temporarily out of service due to unscheduled maintenance. We under-

stand that this may cause concern and inconvenience, and we want to assure all affected passengers that their safe-

ty and comfort remain our highest priority."

"We are working around the clock to

source the required components and technical expertise to return these aircraft to service. We will provide a further update on the fleet status and the full restoration of our schedule as soon as it is available," it added.

The A330neo (CRN) has been grounded since January 11 and cannot return to service until outstanding Rolls-Royce obligations are cleared. Sources indicate that after repairs, the aircraft will require 12-14 weeks to secure a spare engine.

Meanwhile, the A330neo (NIL) was grounded on February 19 after a boroscope inspection revealed cracks on the engine blades, necessitating maintenance. A team of engineers from South African Airways Technical (SAAT) had recommended the inspection to avoid disrupting operations, as the aircraft had been scheduled to operate flights to London yesterday.

For Saturday's cancelled flights, management assured clients they would be placed on alternative carriers "as close to your original schedule as possible." It remains unclear whether similar arrangements were made yesterday, as Ms Rahim declined to provide details.

This development comes on the heels of President Museveni's directive to appoint former Ethiopian Airlines CEO, Mr Girma Wake, to rescue the struggling airline from the dungeons of crisis it has faced since its revival in 2019.

Delayed flights were among the factors that plagued outgoing CEO Jenifer Bamuturaki, ultimately contributing to her premature dismissal earlier this month.

Uganda Airlines was thrust into the spotlight in mid-December last year after widespread disruptions forced frustrated passengers to turn to social media, where they criticised the airline and put its reputation through the wringer.