

Airlines avoid flights over Burma territory

A NUMBER of commercial airlines operating between Bangkok and Europe via the Indian subcontinent have avoided flying over Burma this week to prevent mid-air collisions, airline sources said yesterday.

They said the airlines were concerned air traffic controllers at Rangoon Airport may have left their posts without advance notice to join anti-government protests in the Burmese capital over the past week.

The sources said that some airlines, rather than flying to and from Bangkok over Burma, had since Monday taken the precaution of heading south over Phuket.

They said the detour added one hour to the journey and required extra fuel.

"We cannot risk flying through airspace not covered by a traffic control

service. Some aircraft were told the Burmese airspace was unattended only after they were airborne," an Asian airline official said.

He said affected airlines would resume using the Burmese flight path only if Rangoon could provide what he called more consistent air traffic control from the ground.

But a source at the Aeronautical Radio of Thailand (Aerothai) told the *Bangkok Post* last night that commercial airlines are still flying over Rangoon airspace as usual.

"As far as we have learned, no airlines have avoided the space," he said.

He said Aerothai prepared plans in walkout by Rangoon traffic controllers flights to be rerouted Thai airspace.

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