

Brazil's air traffic system again fails

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Brazil's airlines were trying to make up for lengthy flight delays Monday after its troubled air traffic control system failed over the weekend, stranding travelers just months after a breakdown that enraged thousands of passengers.

A control center in Brasilia that monitors flights through the nation's populous southeast region had suffered a communications equipment failure, Brazil's Defense Ministry said in a statement.

Then power went out at the airport in Brasilia, making the problem worse, officials confirmed Monday. Unusually heavy rains in Sao Paulo put even more strain on the system.

Nearly 30 percent of the flights scheduled for takeoff by Monday afternoon across Latin America's largest nation were delayed, the official Agencia Brasil news service said. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva held an emergency meeting with high-level advisers and ordered them to put in place "effective and efficient" backup systems to put an end to the travel woes.

Authorities believe a software problem caused the breakdown, which prompted controllers to take safety measures, boosting the amount of time between takeoffs and landings at the country's busiest airports.

Though passengers were angered at the delays and spent hours waiting in airports and aboard parked planes, there wasn't a repeat of the chaotic wave of cancellations and delays just ahead of the busy Christmas travel season caused by equipment failures and a work slowdown by controllers.

Authorities first predicted Brazilian flight departures would return to normal by Monday but later extended their estimate to Tuesday afternoon.

The flight delays began several months after a collision between a Gol airlines Boeing 737 and an Embraer Legacy 600 executive jet killed 154 passengers on Sept. 29 in the country's worst air disaster.

After the crash, air traffic controllers significantly slowed airline operations by following regulations to the letter in a "work-to-rule" protest to demand better pay and working conditions.