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SAWS aviation website back online following last month's cyberattack

The South African Weather Service (SAWS) has taken the first major step towards recovery, following a devastating cyber-attack that paralysed the entity's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure four weeks ago, severely impacting its ability to seamlessly provide critical weather and climate services.

Cybersecurity and ICT experts working on the restoration of the compromised ICT systems on Friday, 22 February 2025, got the SAWS aviation website back online for the first time since the attack. This has enabled the aviation industry to access limited, but critical services, including products such as the international significant weather charts, wind charts, domestic and international flight documentation, research products and RADAR images via the website.

The rest of the products such as domestic significant weather charts, atmospheric pressure charts, and airman's reports are undergoing functionality tests and will be available within the shortest possible time. In the meantime, the SAWS' Aviation Weather Centre at OR Tambo International Airport continues to rely on alternative means to disseminate regular aeronautical weather information and updates to the aviation community.

Although the SAWS' main website and hub of weather and climate data is also back online, weather forecasts are not yet accessible on the site. Users will only be able to **access severe weather warnings**, among other things, on the platform. It must be noted that the warnings expire upon the end of their validity periods and that they will then disappear from the site. The SAWS' Marine Portal and WeatherSMART app also remain offline. However, the public and media houses can still access daily rainfall and temperatures as well as severe weather information, via social media platforms and email, respectively.

The restoration of the main and aviation websites come on the back of several other milestones, including the reopening of the SAWS' email system and internet service, both of which were cut off in the wake of the attack in a bid to contain the spread of the malicious software that the cybercriminals used during the attack. These were in addition to the reinforcement of the SAWS' cybersecurity measures to better detect and fend off threats that use both email and the internet as entry points.

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Commenting on the development, the SAWS' Chief Executive Officer Mr Ishaam Abader thanked the public, business partners, and clients for their continued patience, explaining that the stakeholders' understanding has been the single most crucial motivation for the entity's cybersecurity and ICT expert team to work around the clock to reverse the effects of the attack.

"We are still in the early stages of recovery. It took other organisations that fell victim to this kind of crime anything from weeks to months or more to recover fully. We hope to be back on our feet sooner," Mr Abader said, adding that the SAWS cyber-attack was the latest in a series of similar incidents that reportedly rocked several public and private institutions in the last five years.

The SAWS has a legislative mandate to safeguard lives and property through the timely provision of credible weather and climate public good and commercial services. Public good services refer to weather and climate warning services, daily rainfall as well as minimum and maximum temperature data, meteorological support for aviation and maritime search and rescue activities, and service for the benefit of subsistence farmers and fishers.

Commercial services, on the other hand, denote the provision of services to industry players and customers that are not included in the SAWS' international obligations like, for example, the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention, and include the provision of aviation meteorological services, meteorological consultations, and advice to the legal and insurance industries and the provision of specialised services to the media.

End.

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