

30 SENIOR DREAMLINER PILOTS LEAVE AIR INDIA

News / Airlines



In a big blow for flag carrier Air India (AI), 30 senior Boeing 787 Dreamliner pilots have resigned in quick succession setting alarm bells ringing in the state-owned airline and posing a human resource challenge in critical times.

AI, which is surviving on a bailout funded by the taxpayer, spent around Rs 15 crore on training these pilots on its newest jet three years back but with no security bond or contractual obligation, the pilots were free to leave at their own will. The training period can extend up to a few months.

All those who have quit are senior co-pilots with 4,000 hours of average flying experience. "With half that flying experience you can become a captain in a private airline. But career progression opportunities are limited in AI and for a pilot nothing is more important than getting command," said a senior AI captain, who did not wish to be named.

As first reported by HT on July 29, two AI co-pilots have already joined SpiceJet and are doing their command training in South Africa.

"Thirty co-pilots resigning is a big number as it constitutes about one-fourth of the total strength of first officers on the 787 fleet. We have around 120 co-pilots and captains each who fly the Dreamliner. Training will have to be fast-tracked to ensure that operations aren't affected," said a senior official. The pilots who have resigned are serving their six-month notice period.

"We hope the new CMD Ashwani Lohani addresses the problems being faced by pilots otherwise the exodus will continue," said another pilot.

HT reported on August 17 that AI wants its B787-trained cockpit crew to sign a bond which will make them liable to reimburse the training cost to the airline if they leave the company without spending five years on the fleet. However, doubts remain whether pilots, who have already completed their training and are flying the 787, will agree to fill any such bond especially when the company has been deducting 25% of their pay allowances for last three years.

"In future, we plan to train only those pilots who agree to fill the bond," said an AI spokesperson.

"AI cannot afford to see pilots trained at such high costs leave the company within a couple of years. The bond should have been there from the very beginning. This shows poor planning," said aviation expert Subhash Goyal.

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