

KOREAN AIR PILOTS PROTEST INFLUX OF MALAYSIAN FLIGHT CREW

News / Airlines



The Korean Air Pilots Union (KAPU) has expressed opposition to the scope of KAL's plan to accept several Malaysia Airlines captains and senior first officers on secondment despite a shortage of pilots at the Korean flag carrier.

Korean Air plans to hire some 50 to 70 MAS 777 pilots on temporary assignment starting October 1 under the Malaysian flag carrier's restructuring exercise. It expects to take more next year as MAS scales down its operations further.

According to KAPU spokesperson Ben Lee, Korean Air should accept foreign pilots on a more gradual basis. The union's objection centers on charges that KAL has already delayed promotions scheduled for its own pilots due to the shortage.

"The promotion of pilots to a bigger fleet will be affected further when so many foreigners are accepted on secondment," Lee said.

The union also cites complaints that commercial airline pilots in Korea work more in a year—some 1,050 hours—than do their counterparts at Chinese carriers, who fly a maximum of 850 hours.

Korean Air faces a shortage of pilots on its Boeing 747-400, Boeing 777 and Airbus A330-300 fleets due largely to Chinese airlines' ability to lure an increasing number of experienced pilots with offers of more attractive salary packages and benefits.

Some 50 Korean Air pilots have resigned or are in the process of leaving for Chinese carriers. The airline expects more to leave due to delayed promotions.

Captains have taken offers from established airlines while first officers tend to move to low fare carriers and startups.

Chinese airlines also face a pilot shortage due to rapid expansion of their respective networks.

01 SEPTEMBER 2015

SOURCE: AIN

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