RUSSIAN MISSILE THREAT: CATHAY PACIFIC DIVERTS FLIGHTS TO HONG KONG AWAY FROM CASPIAN SEA AND IRAN

News / Airlines

Cathay Pacific has suspended flights over Iran and the Caspian Sea following warnings from air safety agencies that Russian missiles targeting Syrian rebels pose a threat to passenger jets.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation and the European Aviation Safety Agency issued safety advisories last week over intensifying military activity.

Russia, since late September, has been firing rockets over these areas -- where major commercial flight paths intersect -- into war-torn Syria, targeting Islamic State.

Cathay Pacific stopped routing aircraft over the danger zone last Thursday and confirmed it received the guidance which "made no specific recommendations to carriers" at the time of the issuance.

A handful of other airlines, including Air France, previously flying over the Caspian Sea, Iraq and Iran are reported to have joined the Hong Kong-based carrier, in rerouting away from the military

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activity.

Cathay said it had a long-term policy not to fly over Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Syria.

"In view of the situation in the region, Cathay Pacific suspended all flights over Iran and the Caspian Sea since last Thursday until further notice," a spokeswoman said. "We continue to monitor and review the situation on a daily basis."

Flights 293 and 292 -- to and from Rome -- are currently being routed over northern China, towards Moscow, before taking a southern flight path into the Italian capital, instead of directly flying over the Caspian Sea.

Flight times between the two cities are expected to increase slightly.

Airlines have taken greater caution flying over Eastern Europe following the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight 17 last July over eastern Ukraine - killing all 298 people on board. Dutch investigators released conclusions of their probe into the case yesterday, finding a Russian-made Buk missile brought down the plane.

The Civil Aviation Department confirmed the "potential risk to flight safety" and issued flight warnings informing Hong Kong-based airlines not to fly over the affected region.

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