

# Aircraft refused landing

DRAGONAIR has called for an investigation into procedures operated by air traffic controllers in Guangzhou following their refusal to allow an emergency landing by a regular charter flight from Guilin yesterday morning.

The managing director of Dragonair, Dr Helmut Sohmen, said the airline had demanded a thorough investigation of the incident by the authorities of Guangzhou and the Civil Aviation Authority of China in Beijing.

The 737 flight from Guilin had been due to land at Kai Tak early yesterday but was unable to touch down because of heavy fog.

Other airports in the region, including Taipei, had already closed but Guangzhou had been alerted to remain open to receive the diverted Dragonair flight.

But a Dragonair spokesman said the authorities in Guangzhou "ignored internationally agreed practices" to provide assistance to aircraft in times of distress.

"Guangzhou authorities ignored this internationally agreed practice, maintaining they had no authority to accept the Guilin flight. No reason was given for their refusal," the spokesman said.

Hongkong air traffic controllers were then forced to appeal to Taipei airport for permission for Dragonair to land, although the airline is not licensed to operate into Taiwan.

Lack of space at Taipei airport meant the authorities in Taiwan could only accept the aircraft for the time it took to re-fuel.

Weather conditions in Hongkong had further deteriorated during the night and an agreement was re-

quired from Guangzhou to again be prepared to accept a diverted flight before the aircraft could leave Taipei.

The spokesman said it was only at 3.20 am after urgent appeals by Dragonair to the Director of Operations at Guangzhou Airport that the airline was assured the aircraft would be allowed to land.

After circling Hongkong for more than 30 minutes, bad weather forced the flight to divert to Guangzhou, where it landed at 6.30 am yesterday morning, seven hours after it had left Guilin.

The spokesman said the flight was grounded in China for a few hours before arriving in Hongkong at 1.15 pm.

He said a fresh crew for the Dragonair flight had been flown out to Guangzhou on a CAAC plane yesterday morning to bring the aircraft into Hongkong.

He said the airline had in the past had good relations with civil aviation authorities on the mainland and was allowed to operate out of 10 different destinations.

But the airline would wait to see the Chinese authorities' response to their complaint before deciding what action to take.

A spokesman for Cathay Pacific said the proximity of the Guangzhou and Hongkong airports meant it was not normally possible to divert aircraft between the two airports.

"The two airports are so close together the weather conditions tend to be similar and so we usually have to divert to Taipei if the weather is poor," the spokesman said.

But he said Cathay had "good relations" with the authorities in Guangzhou and he was not aware of any problems in the past.