

6.4

...and pilots feel grounded

By MICHAEL CHUGANI

Cathay Pacific pilots and flight engineers have asked for action to protect their incomes against the sliding Hongkong dollar.

Union leaders representing the airline's cockpit crew approached CPA bosses two weeks ago when the Hongkong dollar tumbled past \$9.50 against the greenback.

They wanted a guarantee that their money will be protected.

Their action makes them the second group of expatriates to demand protection against the Hongkong dollar's nose-dive.

Only last week Hongkong's expatriate civil servants voiced similar worries and demanded swift Government action.

Leaders of the Association of Expatriate Civil Servants agreed unanimously at a meeting to approach the Secretary for Civil Service, Mr Martin Rowlands, for help.

The Cathay Pacific action is spearheaded by the Hongkong Aircrew Officers' Association — a group which represents nearly 400 CPA pilots and engineers, virtually all of whom are expatriates.

SCM Post sources revealed that association leaders approached management two weeks ago asking for the Hongkong dollar to be pegged against other major currencies for all salary purposes.

This unitisation of the dollar would have the effect of protecting incomes against the local currency's wild fluctuations.

Such a move would, in fact, result in a pay rise for the pilots and flight engineers.

The association's action was triggered by a fear among members that the dollar had reached an uncontrollable runaway situation.

Some sources said the pilots and flight engineers had threatened industrial action if their demands were not met.

But this was firmly denied by a separate source close to the issue.

The source said the CPA management was sympathetic to the association's request, but asked for more time to consider it.

However, several days later, when the Hongkong dollar stabilised following promises of Government action, the CPA management told the association that "events had overtaken" their earlier discussion.

The management told association leaders the Hongkong dollar was no longer a runaway currency, only a weakened one.

But the pilots and engineers are not giving up. Sources say they have instead demanded a heftier pay adjustment which takes into account the weakened dollar.

Salaries go up on January 1 and negotiations are about to start. The management has responded initially by telling the association that the Swire Group — of which CPA is a part — has yet to take a "corporate position" on pay rises.

Like the disgruntled expatriate civil servants, the CPA pilots and engineers say the devalued dollar is affecting not only their savings but their regular overseas commitments like mortgage payments and school fees for their children which must be paid in foreign currencies.

J.C.M.P.

15-10-

4 Oct 1983