

Aeroflot's third direct link

RUSSIAN carrier Aeroflot is to introduce its third direct flight between Moscow and Hong Kong next April.

According to Vassili Tkachenko, Aeroflot's general manager for Hong Kong, the passenger load factor has gone up from 62 to 100 per cent since the service began in August last year.

"Our problem now is that we have too many people wanting to fly with us," he said.

Awarded rights to operate five flights a week, Aeroflot started with one flight, using new Airbus A310s, and extended it to two last November. Mr Tkachenko said the third flight might be extended to Sydney.

"Aeroflot has changed completely since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now called Aeroflot Russian International Airlines, it is the legal successor to what was known as Aeroflot Soviet Airlines. What is more, the airline will shortly be privatised."

Aeroflot is the biggest airline in the world with a fleet of more than 100 aircraft flying to 135 cities in more than 98 countries. Last year, it carried 120 million passengers, two million tonnes of cargo, both nationally and internationally, and recorded a profit of US\$21.3 million.

The carrier lost its monopoly on international routes last year in what was the former Soviet Union

By KARL WILSON



Vassili Tkachenko

as new sovereign states formed their own airlines.

Mr Tkachenko said there were now 60 airlines flying in the Russian Federation and 22 in the former republics.

"Some operate independent international services under their new national flags, while others still fly overseas under the Aeroflot flag in accordance with a special agreement signed last year with the airlines," he said.

"These airlines constituted 22.1 per cent of the total volume per-

formed by Aeroflot last year in terms of passenger-kilometres, and 22.7 per cent in terms of tonne-kilometres.

"The airline also underwent a major route restructuring last year in which a number of uneconomic routes were cancelled and new routes added. We began new services to Hong Kong, the United States, Asia and Europe."

Mr Tkachenko, who has been with the airline for 33 years, conceded that Aeroflot's international image "was not good".

"That image is changing," he said. "Yes, in the past Aeroflot hired military pilots, but today we are finding fewer and fewer military people coming to us."

He said the demand for air freight had now reached a point where the airline was thinking of starting a cargo service between Hong Kong and Moscow within the next two years.

"We have the freighters, but, unfortunately, they do not meet up with the minimum noise control levels set down by the Civil Aviation Department.

"So we are looking at two possibilities: we either form a joint partnership with another airline and use their aircraft to fly freight to Moscow, or we use Russian transport aircraft and operate a service from Shenzhen, as most of our cargo today comes from that part of the world.