Thai delays MD-11 decision

BANGKOK

Thai Airways has been forced by a Government ministry to postpone again its decision to buy US equipment for its fleet expansion (Flight, February 6, page 4).

A wrangle has been continuing for months over the choice of the McDonnell Douglas MD-11 in preference to the Airbus Industrie A340, and it is jeopardising expansion plans, a senior Thai official tells Flight.

A second study comparing the two aircraft concluded for a second time that the MD-11 is more suitable for the airline’s purposes, but the Communications Ministry continues to dispute the findings and has ordered another three-month investigation.

The official says that the delay, until at least June, will hurt expansion plans. New route agreements with various countries, including the USA, come into effect next year, but Thai will not be able to operate them, he adds.

The official also says that the postponement jeopardises the airline’s plans to modernise its fleet, an area of the airline’s purposes, but the Communications Ministry continues to dispute the findings and has ordered another three-month investigation.

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Thai Airways insists that the MD-11 offers more passenger seats (288, in contrast to the Airbus’s 240). The MD-11 is also considerably cheaper, with McDonnell Douglas offering Thai a price of $90.3 million per aircraft, against $95.1 million for the A340. The MD-11 has greater fuel efficiency, according to the carrier, but the Ministry says that results of those tests are still inconclusive.

BA looks at turboprops

GLASGOW

British Airways’ Highlands Division is evaluating a number of twin-turboprop aircraft types as an eventual replacement for its British Aerospace 748 fleet. The Division, which operates Scotland’s “b lifeline” routes as well as a variety of UK domestic and internal West German services, reportedly has an initial requirement for up to six aircraft.

It stresses that there is no prospect of an early decision and that the assessment programme has not even reached the shortlist stage. Under consideration are the Aerospatiale/Aeritalia ATR42, BAE ATP, de Havilland Canada Dash 8-300, and the Fokker 50.

BA’s current 748 fleet numbers six aircraft, with a further five on lease, two of which are to come from Lufthansa subsidiary DLT this spring. This will allow for the provision of a backup machine as well as a frequency increase on some busier routes, particularly between Glasgow and Manchester where 748s will replace present BAE One-Elevens.

Pan Am threatened by unions

NEW YORK

The US Teamsters’ Union, which represents 4,500 Pan American ticket agents and ground handlers, has been unable to gain the support of the airline’s other unions, and is thus not expected to call a strike.

Union disruption has been threatened over cuts in pay and work benefits imposed by the troubled airline’s management, which is desperate to gain $180 million in pay concessions (Flight, March 5, page 4).

Pan Am has been hiring and training new reservations agents and ground workers in preparation for a strike, but it appears that the other unions are afraid that a strike could push Pan Am into bankruptcy and would probably result in it becoming a non-union carrier, like Continental.

Without support from the pilots, cabin attendants, or the Transport Workers’ Union (which represents 5,000 mechanics, service workers, and ground despatchers), harassment is now the teamsters’ most likely tactic. William Genoese, director of the Teamsters’ Union line division says: “There will be guerrilla war at all the airports. Passengers are really going to suffer in this situation.” Among the tactics being considered are misdirecting baggage and cargo, and cancelling passenger reservations.

MARKETPLACE

Comair, a Cincinnati (Ohio)-based commuter, has taken delivery of the 700th Fairchild Metro. Comair now operates 21 of the type.

Aer Lingus has ordered a Boeing 737 simulator from Rediffusion Simulation on which to train pilots on the 737-300, -400, and -500 types.

Air Botswana has bought two Aerospatiale/Aeritalia ATR42s for delivery in July and October this year. A third ATR42 may be bought next year. Botswana is one of the few African countries able to buy aircraft outright without incurring large debts or leasing burdens.

Air Midwest, of Wichita (Kansas), has ordered five more Embraer EMB-120 Brasillas, taking its total order for the type to 14. It received the first aircraft in May 1986, and now has four of the original order in service.

The Kingdom of Tonga has leased a McDonnell Douglas MD-87 from the GWA group, allowing the island to offer international air services for the first time. Flights will begin in mid-1988 to Australia, New Zealand, and various neighbouring islands.

Malaysian Airline System (MAS) has ordered a second Boeing 747-400 combi. The first is scheduled to enter service in April 1989, and the second in June 1989. The aircraft will be configured for 294 seats in three classes.

Page Avjet of Orlando, Florida, has hushkitted two McDonnell Douglas DC8F-55 freighters for Affretair, the national cargo airline of Zimbabwe.

Gulf Air has ordered two Boeing 767-300ERs for delivery in June and November this year. They will be operated on longhaul routes to the USA, Australia, and Japan.

Nigeria Airways has ordered six Aerospatiale/Aeritalia ATR42s, revising its previous policy of being an all-jet carrier. The first three aircraft are scheduled to enter service in October, and the remaining three in mid-1989.

Bae’s Advanced Turboprop (ATP), one of the options being considered by British Airways