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LEADING THE NEWS

AVIATION

CATHAY CLOSES PILOT BASE IN LONDON

Move leaves most of 100 crew members in Britain jobless and will be followed by review of US centre

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Hong Kong flag carrier Cathay Pacific Airways has confirmed it is closing its London pilot base, leaving most of the 100 cockpit crew members employed there out of a job.

The closure of Cathay's British outpost will be followed by a review of its last pilot base in the United States – part of continuous cost-cutting efforts at the pandemic-battered airline – placing 140 jobs there on the line as well.

Pilots at the London base were told on Monday in a memo that their services would no longer be required, but the carrier said it would relocate some eligible people back to Hong Kong.

Cathay added that it would start the review of its US base, once its largest overseas pilot centre, this year. The review and the closure of the British base follow the termination of some 280 crew jobs in Canada, Germany, Australia and New Zealand.

"Cathay Pacific has informed the concerned pilots of its decision to close the pilot base in

London after an intensive consultation period," a company spokeswoman said.

"The decision is not one we have taken lightly and does not reflect on the professionalism of the pilots based in London."

The representative also confirmed the plan to review the US outpost. Pilots there have been receiving just half of their salaries since May last year.

The *Post* previously revealed Cathay's intention to close the London pilot base in July.

The beleaguered airline has consolidated its staff at its Hong

Kong hub, where many pilots remain grounded and 89 aircraft – or almost two-fifths of the fleet – were in indefinite storage as of June.

Cathay pointed out that the bulk of its pilots employed overseas had not flown since early 2020, and that local staff had agreed to permanent pay cuts in response to the airline's coronavirus-related restructuring to avoid redundancies.

The cost-cutting lay-offs stretch back almost three years, starting with the closure of cabin crew bases in the US and Canada

that resulted in several hundred staff members being jettisoned.

In the first half of 2021, Cathay continued to push a range of permanent and temporary staffing cuts in a bid to reduce costs. As

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A CATHAY PACIFIC SPOKESWOMAN

a result, the group's workforce has fallen by a further 2,500, to 23,100, since the end of last year. It now employs about 3,000 pilots.

It shed a record 5,900 jobs in October 2020, when it shut down regional carrier Cathay Dragon.

On Wednesday, the airline said it had also let go of "a small number" of staff who had declined to get vaccinated against the coronavirus. Since September 1, the carrier has been operating all flights with crews that have received jabs.

Cathay recorded a shortfall of HK\$7.6 billion in the first half of the year, bringing its accumulated pandemic-inflicted losses to HK\$29.2 billion.