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Middle East carriers will need 36,000 new pilots

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flight crews required for plane orders worth \$450b

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GULF NEWS

Dubai: The Middle East needs 36,000 new pilots to fly the 2,520 new planes that will be delivered to the region between this year and 2030, according to the latest estimates by Boeing.

Worldwide, the pilot requirement will rise to almost 459,600 in the same period, as a total of 33,500 new aircraft are set for delivery by 2030, at an estimated market value of \$4.06 trillion (Dh14.9 trillion), of which the Middle East commands \$450 billion.

But it's not just the shortage of pilots that airlines across the globe are currently grappling with.

There is also a strong demand for more than 40,000 aviation industry personnel currently, according to Roei Ganzarski, chief customer officer for Boeing Flight Services.

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Expansion hitch

"Our airline customers tell us that a global pilot shortage is hampering growth plans and that they are struggling to find enough pilots to fly new routes and to add flights to existing routes.

"Boeing is catering to their needs by addressing all possible areas," he said, adding that the future of training for Boeing is focused on greater use and increased reliance on technology and digital devices among other elements.

The US planemaker, which is looking at plane sales worth around \$4 trillion and services worth \$2.3 trillion in the period to 2030, trains about 30,000 people a year at 18 training centres around the world, Ganzarski said.

But as US-based aviation analyst Ernest S Arvai, president and CEO of The Arvai Group, an aviation consultancy, points out: "The pilot requirements for Gulf carriers will continue to grow, and unfortunately, at a faster rate than local Gulf pilots can be trained."

Training challenge

He added that typically an airline needs "seven to nine flight crews per aircraft" to accommodate scheduling and rest periods required by regulations.

With the rollout of Boeing's new plane, the 787 Dreamliner, the need for additional training centres seems to be rising. Asked if Boeing could potentially open a 787 training centre in the Middle East, a region with large orders for the 787, Ganzarski told Gulf News: "I cannot comment on it right now. We continue to explore ideas."

But while new training facilities have emerged in the Gulf, the region is not graduating the number of pilots

necessary to accommodate growth and retirements, according to Arvai.

"Gulf carriers need to establish additional training academies and find locals to train to meet these critical requirements," he said.

Meanwhile, the UAE carriers employ more than 4,000 pilots, with Emirates counting 2,687 first officers and captains, followed by over 1,000 pilots by Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways, 270 and 244 pilots by two budget carriers Air Arabia and flydubai respectively. And a number of planes are on the way.

Emirates has 199 wide-bodied aircraft on order currently, worth more than \$66 billion, the bulk of which comprises Airbus A380 superjumbos.

Etihad is due to take delivery of 92 planes by the end 2012 to make a fleet of 155 aircraft.

More turbulence ahead

US planemaker Boeing yesterday predicted more sales cancellations for its delayed Dreamliner 787, after a Chinese airline scrapped 24 orders, but said the overall order book for the new long-range aircraft remained strong.

A day after news of China Eastern's cancellations — it will instead spend \$3.3 billion (Dh12.11 billion) to buy 45 new Boeing 737 aircraft — a Boeing executive said some orders would fall through as it adjusted delivery dates and that the pace of production of the fuel-efficient aircraft would pick up.

"Frankly as we look forward, we expect to see the Dreamliner order base increase, we expect to see more orders, we expect to see more cancellations, especially as we go through mitigation with our customers," Boeing marketing vice-president Randy

Tinseth told a briefing in Seoul.

China Southern Airlines, Asia's largest carrier by passenger numbers, too said it may scrap its 10 orders for Boeing 787 aircraft after delivery of the first plane was pushed back to July.

— *Agencies*