

Vistara cutting 30 flights daily

- A Monitor Desk Report

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New Delhi: Vistara airlines has decided to reduce the number of flights its operates by up to 30 a day for the rest of April, as it aims to stabilise operations after a no-show by pilots upset over a new pay structure severely disrupted the network for a full week this month.

"We are carefully scaling back our operations by around 25-30 flights per day, i.e. roughly 10pc of the capacity we were operating. This will take us back to the same level of flight operations as at the end of February 2024, and provide the much-needed resilience and buffer in the rosters," the full-service airline said in a statement on Sunday.

The airline operated 9,331 flight departures in the month of February or around 322 flights per day, data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) showed. In March, the number was about 350 flights a day. Vistara, a 51:49 joint venture of Tata Sons and Singapore Airlines,

faced network disruptions, with over 50 flight cancellations a day last week, as disgruntled pilots called in sick en masse. On Sunday, the flight cancellations reduced to around 15 flights.

Vistara is the third-largest airline in India with a 9.9pc market share in the domestic aviation market, after Air India at 12.8pc and IndiGo at 60.1pc, as per the latest DGCA data.

The airline added that the flight cancellations over the last week were done mostly in its domestic network, and all the affected passengers have already been re-accommodated on other flights.

"Looking ahead, we are hopeful of stable operations for the rest of the month and beyond," the airline added.

The Delhi-based airline has blamed poor rostering for the network disruption over the last few weeks. It bore the brunt of poor crew rostering - a process of workload distribution - following a large number of unplanned sick leave, as there were just not enough pilots to back up and the existing lot were already stretched to their limits.

Also, the relationship between the airline and some pilots soured over implementation of a uniform pay structure, which effectively reduced the salaries of Vistara pilots by bringing them at par with Air India.

Under the new contract, the pilots of Vistara get a fixed salary for 40 hours instead of 70 hours earlier. In addition, they receive payment in lieu of extra flying hours and rewards will also be given based on the years of service with the airline.

"We would like to clarify that over 98% of pilots have signed the new contract. Having said that, we are aware that some pilots have some concerns and queries regarding the contract. We are engaging with them to clarify and resolve the same. However, this has not caused any visible spike in attrition amongst pilots," the airline's chief executive officer Vinod Kannan said in a statement on Saturday.

He added that the airline is addressing this on a "war footing," is hiring more pilots, and has deployed larger aircraft like our B787-9 Dreamliner and A321neo aircraft on select domestic routes to accommodate customers affected by the cancellations and delays.

"We would like to again clarify that these disruptions were due to the

cascading effect of a multitude of factors. While we do have adequate crew for normal operations, since we have been operating on a high utilisation, we were challenged due to operational disruption,"

"The situation has already improved with our on-time performance improving for the last three days. We hope to stabilize our operations for the rest of April 2024 by this weekend," he added.

The airline's on-time performance was recorded at 79.1pc on 6 April, while Air India Express was the most punctual at 91pc. IndiGo recorded an on-time performance of 79.6pc, and Air India was at 73.3pc.

Last week, Air India pilots had written to Tata Group chairman N Chandrasekaran, backing concerns about remuneration and work-life balance raised by their peers at Vistara. They also called the issues raised by Vistara as 'systemic' that cut across Tata group's aviation entities, in a sign of a broader discontent among the conglomerate's pilot community.

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