

## **PH aviation fails ICAO safety test anew (Philippines)**



MANILA, Philippines - The Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (Caap) will remain in Category 2 status as it has again flunked a review conducted by inspectors from the International Civil Aviation Organization (Icao).

As such, Caap will remain in Category 2 status; the Icao team was said to have found two "significant safety concerns [SSC]" during its 10-day evaluation. The team said Caap "failed" in "aircraft registration and flight safety inspection."

Flag carrier Philippine Airlines had hoped that the country's aviation industry would revert to Category 1 status so that its newly purchased B777 would be able to fly to new routes in the United States and Europe.

The "Icao Coordinated Validation Mission" made the announcement during an exit briefing with Caap officials on Wednesday, according to airport sources. The sources said the team would return in February for another evaluation.

The team leader, Henry Gourджи, said an official statement would be sent to the Caap after 15 days.

The other members of the group were Jean Claude Waffo of aerodrome ground airfield facilities (AGA); Allan Tang, licensing; Vincent Lambottea, operations; Amal Hewawasam, airworthiness; Kong Cheong, airworthiness; and Sekhat Natarjan Chandr, AGA.

In 2007 the then-Air Transportation Office (Ato) was downgraded from Category 1 to Category 2 status after the Icao found 89 SSC during an inspection.

The resulting brouhaha forced the administration to abolish the Ato and created the Caap, under Republic Act (RA), 9497.

RA 9497 was explicit that the next Caap director general should be appointed "permanently" for six years, so that he/she would not be subject to political pressures.

But five years after it was created, the Caap has already had five director generals.

The latest, retired Lt. Gen. William Hotchkiss said upon assumption in June this year that he hopes to return Caap to Category 1 status before the end of the year.

"Hopefully, we might have some good news by Christmas. But I cannot say outright whether we will get into Category 1," he said.

The Department of Transportation and Communications earlier said only two out of the 22 actionable items identified by the US Federal Aviation Authority as safety concerns remained unresolved.

These were the lack of qualified safety personnel and the absence of an integrated IT system to modernize the sector's database.

The Icao group's visit coincided with the breakdown of the very high frequency omni-directional range (VOR), a crucial navigational aid in major airports that caused the diversion to Clark of nine international flights and three domestic flights.

On October 9 the VOR conked out again, forcing at least 13 local and one international flight to be diverted to the Diosdado Macapagal International Airport.

Two years ago, the VOR/DME (distance measuring equipment) failed to be on air for two months after more than 12 years of service.

The Caap had to cannibalize the Subic VOR to replace the so-called defective elements, thus bugging the Manila VOR. The Manila International Airport Authority (Miaa) agreed to fund the purchase of a new VOR, estimated between P80 million and P120 million.

Then-Transportation Secretary Mar Roxas II approved the emergency purchase of a new VOR, which was also approved by the Miaa board during an full court (en banc) session.

Transportation Undersecretary for Planning and Operations Rafael Antonio Santos, signed in behalf of Roxas, the same source said.

However, it appears that the Caap failed to form a Bids and Awards Committee that would decide whom to award the right to purchase

the VOR.

Many airline companies, especially the low-cost carriers, are complaining about the frequent diversions to Clark, Cebu and Laoag, which eat into their profits. They criticize the slow progress being made in the aviation sector, but are afraid to air their criticisms publicly for fear of backlash from administration officials.

<http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/business/10/31/12/ph-aviation-fails-icao-safety-test-aneu>