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Aeroflot, Transaero Undeterred by Dreamliner Woes

By Roland Oliphant

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Boeing said it is working “around the clock” to resolve the 787 problem.

The global grounding of Boeing's flagship 787 Dreamliner has not deterred Russian airlines from buying the aircraft, the country's two largest airlines said.

Europe on Thursday followed the United States, India, Chile and Japan in ordering all 787 Dreamliners to be grounded until an investigation into a technical fault that forced one of the aircraft to make an emergency landing in Japan earlier this week.

Japan's ANA, which has 17 Dreamliners, and Japan Airlines, which has seven, voluntarily halted flights of the aircraft Wednesday after the emergency landing. Japanese national aviation authorities have now made the grounding an official directive.

Japan Airlines, which introduced the Dreamliner onto its Domodedovo-Tokyo route in May last year, said the grounding would not affect its thrice-weekly Russia flights.

"There are no changes or cancellations. We have already drafted other aircraft to fulfill flights on the route. Friday's flight will be carried out by a Boeing 777-200," said a company spokeswoman at the Moscow office of JAL.

Investigators said Thursday that it appeared a lithium-ion battery beneath the cockpit had overheated and leaked corrosive liquid, causing the burning smell in the cockpit that forced the emergency landing in Japan.

The Dreamliner is the first commercial jet to use the light-weight but powerful lithium-ion batteries.

Some parts of the Boeing Dreamliner are produced in Russia, but the company declined to comment when asked whether the battery in question was a Russian-produced component or whether any Russian-produced components were involved in the current safety concerns.

While Japan Airlines' flights between Domodedovo and Tokyo remain the only regular use of the Dreamliner in Russia to date, two Russian airlines, Aeroflot and Transaero, have placed orders for the aircraft.

Aeroflot did not respond to repeated requests to comment Thursday, but a spokesman told Izvestia that the company had no plans to cancel its order.

"We are monitoring the situation and recent events with the Dreamliner, but have no plans to change our plans in relation to the aircraft. We have a hard contract for 22 planes with the first delivery due in 2016," the spokesman said.

Transaero, which signed a contract for its four Dreamliners in April 2012 with deliveries starting in the first quarter of 2014, also said it had no plans to cancel the deal.

Boeing has promised full cooperation with investigating authorities and said in a statement Wednesday that it was working "around the clock" to resolve the issue.

The aviation giant went on to defend the largely composite material aircraft, which it has portrayed as a technologically advanced game changer in civil aviation.

"Boeing is committed to supporting the FAA and finding answers as quickly as possible. The company is working around the clock with its customers and the various regulatory and investigative authorities. We will make available the entire resources of The Boeing Company to assist."

"We are confident the 787 is safe, and we stand behind its overall integrity. We will be taking every necessary step in the coming days to assure our customers and the traveling public of the 787's safety and to return the airplanes to service," the statement said.

Contact the author at r.oliphant@imedia.ru

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