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of losing skilled pilots,
on

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Cape Town - The aviation industry is facing a global pilot shortage - and SA's well-trained and highly experienced captains make for soft targets to be lured abroad.

While the shortage makes becoming an international pilot all the more attractive (and rewarding), the issue might also mean that SA's flight industry can be left high and dry if pilots are headhunted for their experience.

SAA Pilots Association (SAAPA) chairperson Captain Jimmy Conroy says he fears the local airline industry and the country may lose a large number of pilots to international airlines.

According to Conroy most of the 750 pilots of South African Airways meet the international caption requirements to work abroad, and have a cumulative total of over 12 000 years of experience at SAA alone.

"Foreign carriers looking for suitably trained pilots realise that SAA may be a source of scarce skills to be exploited. In doing so, they obtain experienced pilots at little or no cost.

"To compound this problem," Conroy says, "South African Airways (SAA) is currently not training any new pilots through its previously highly successful Cadet Training Programme, which had until recently, been making substantial inroads into the transformation of the pilot profession in South Africa."

He adds that he is aware of 60 pilots who had left various South African carriers to take up positions with foreign carriers over the last 12 months.

"Most of them took up positions with Middle Eastern carriers. South African licences were recently recognised by the Chinese aviation authorities, which further opens the market to experienced South African airline pilots," Conroy says.

Pilot training anywhere in the world is very expensive and that there are aviation colleges who train pilots but few pilots are sponsored by airlines in South Africa, with none currently sponsored by SAA.

"According to 20-year industry projections, it is clear that the shrinking pool of experienced or future pilots is going to heat up competition among global carriers for the best and most proficient pilots. SAA, in this scenario, can ill afford to lose any pilots."

Apart from the expensive experience SA's pilots offer, they also have an opportunity to raise their incomes significantly.

According to a report in Bloomberg, Chinese airlines alone need to hire approximately 100 pilots a week for the next 20 years to meet accelerating travel demand.



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Facing a shortage of candidates at home, these airlines are offering lucrative pay packages to foreigners with cockpit experience.

Because of the boom in demand, some major expanding global carriers are paying about 50% more than what some senior captains earn in the United States. This means that pilots in emerging markets such as South Africa could quadruple their salaries.

Global pilot shortage a reality

The global supply of commercial airline pilots is estimated at 281 000, commercial aviation consultancy Airlnsight says. Airbus and Boeing both foresee strong traffic growth continuing, with Boeing projecting global demand for 558 000 pilots by 2034.

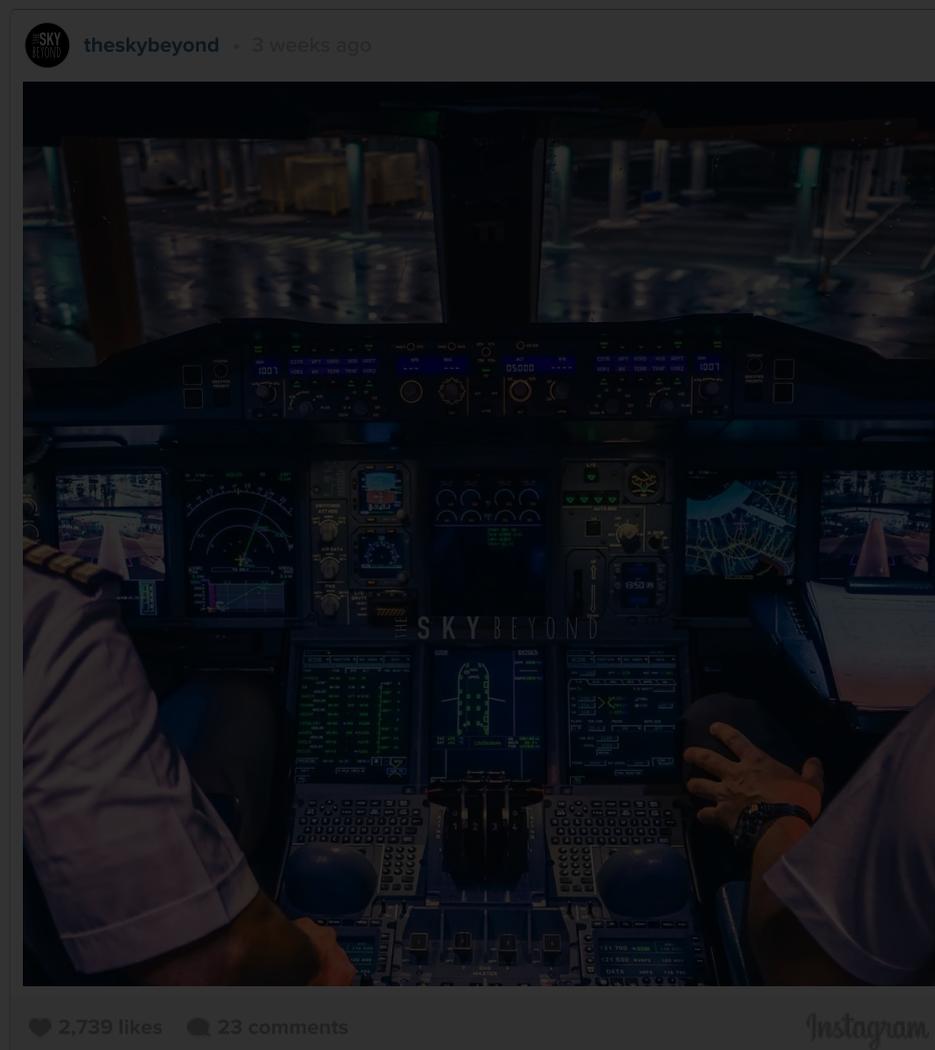
A more conservative estimate, as forecast by Airbus, points to a need for at least 428 988 new pilots by 2034 - a 53% growth in commercial pilots over today's numbers.

The shortage of experienced pilots was initially thought to only be a threat in the rapidly expanding the Middle East and Asian markets, but has spread to North America, Europe and Africa, suggesting that international airlines may start plundering pilots from South Africa, Airlnsight says.

This unprecedented demand is driven by record orders which will see the world's airliner fleet almost double from 23 000 aircraft in 2014 to over 44 500 by 2033.

For each of these new aircraft, two pilots (at least) are needed for it to be used at full capacity daily.

If you'd like to know what it takes to be an international pilot, check out: Boeing needs 31 000 new pilots, here's how to be one



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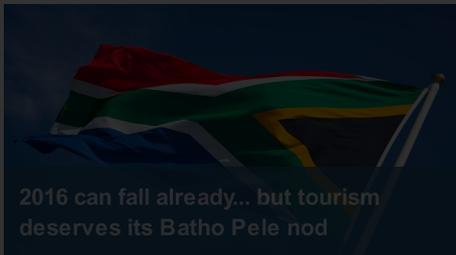
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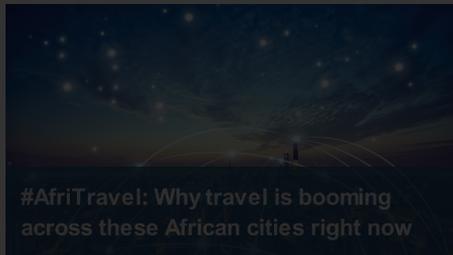
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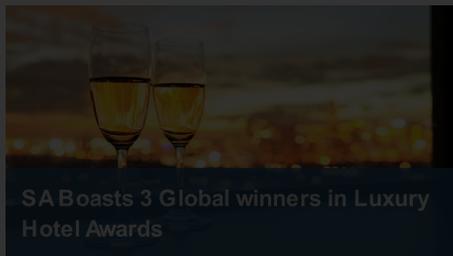
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