

Perjury probe on Cathay execs over 49ers trial

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Two Cathay Pacific executives are being investigated for allegedly lying during a trial over the airline's unfair dismissal of 49 pilots in 2001.

The complaint pertains to statements made at the trial last year by director of flight operations Nick Rhodes and industrial relations manager Zdenek Kroutil.

They said there are no documents relating to the July 2001 meetings of a Cathay review team that decided to dismiss the pilots.

Police received a report of perjury in December.

"The case is being investigated by the district crime squad of Central district. No arrest has been made at this stage," a spokesman said.

In November, the High Court ruled Cathay Pacific behaved wrongly in firing dozens of pilots in 2001. Seventeen pilots are now in line for up to HK\$3.5 million in damages for being defamed by the airline when it sacked them and 32 other pilots - a group known as "the 49ers."

The dismissals came after years of wrangling over rosters and flying hours, with stepped-up industrial action in the wind.

Court of First Instance judge Anselmo Reyes also singled out current chief executive and then director of corporate development Tony Tyler, and Philip Chen Nan-lok, then chief operating officer and now chairman of John Swire & Sons (China), for making damaging statements against the pilots, including "holding Hong Kong to ransom."

The ruling is being appealed.

According to the complaint, Rhodes and Kroutil said documents for management meetings held over three days in July 2001 were destroyed after that year.

But subsequently they produced a crew list related to the same meetings, printed out in 2004, a source told The Standard.

Asked to comment on the complaint, Rhodes said he was "not aware of any perjury suit." Kroutil could not be reached.

The source said it is believed that during the trial last October, Rhodes and Kroutil "did not tell the truth while giving evidence under oath ... regarding some documents, in effect, committed perjury."

In court transcripts made available to The Standard, Rhodes said: "We weren't trying to be evasive. There were no documents attached to the meeting."

But there were various lists of crew as the only agenda item was to review whether they were working in Cathay's best interests, he adds.

Kroutil told the court that they were advised to delete the lists of crew, and so he did not keep a copy.