CHINESE ATC TO ADOPT ENGLISH-ONLY POLICY

News / Airlines

China will mandate that its air traffic controllers use only English when communicating with pilots of any airline starting in 2017, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC).

According to Zhao Yun, an official at the CAAC in Beijing, "the move will improve situational awareness for foreign pilots. By ATC communicating in English pilots will be aware of the position of every aircraft in the airspace," said Zhao.

Currently, ATC at all airports across China use English to communicate with pilots of foreign airlines and Mandarin with those flying for Chinese carriers. Zhao said the CAAC will announce the exact date for implementation later, ensuring the readiness of all stakeholders involved in the process.

He added that the CAAC does not expect any problems with the implementation because most Chinese pilots and air traffic controllers have taken mandatory six-month English courses before starting their initial training. That rule took effect in 1998.

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Zhao characterized the English-only mandate as another step forward for China's aviation industry.

Early this year pilots from three Southeast Asian airlines had expressed concern about the lack of a common language among all pilots tuned in to the frequency to communicate with ATC at Beijing Capital International Airport (BCIA). "We took the feedback from the pilots of the three airlines seriously to make the decision for a common language to be used," Zhao said.

BCIA, with its three parallel runways, two extending 12,500 feet long and the other 11,302 feet, is the busiest airport in China.

27 NOVEMBER 2015

SOURCE: AIN
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