

Further relief awarded to Covid-battered airlines

POST REPORTERS

A relief package for Covid 19-battered airlines was yesterday extended by the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand (CAAT).

The extension was granted at CAAT's first board meeting of the year, chaired by Transport Minister Saksayam Chidchob, and was the third approved by the board since the onset of the pandemic in late March last year.

The agenda focused on how to help airlines battered by the pandemic.

Seven local airlines — Thai AirAsia and Thai AirAsia X, Bangkok Airways, Nok Air, Thai Smile Airways, Thai Lion Air and Thai Vietjet Air — have sought 14-billion-baht in soft loans (easier terms and conditions) to sustain their operations.

Even that sum was a substantial reduction on the 24 billion baht they requested last year.

The board decided that relief measures for the airlines be reviewed every quarter.

It announced that relief for the

current quarter ending in March would incorporate assistance in four areas — it extended a 50% discount on landing charges for domestic and international flights; a continued waiver of parking charges for airlines that have suspended operations due to the pandemic; keeping the 50% reduction on parking charges for both domestic and international airlines; and extending the 50% discount on air navigation service charges for domestic flights and 20% for international flights.

The board will also seek funding from the government to offset the financial hit the CAAT will incur by offering the relief.

Meanwhile, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said yesterday demand for travel barely budged last November.

The association said the airline industry's recovery stalled following a resurgence in Covid-19 cases and the re-introduction of travel restrictions in some regions.

Industry-wide revenue passenger-kilometres fell by 70.3% year-on-year

in November, broadly unchanged from the 70.6% decline seen in October and only slightly better than the 72.2% fall in September.

In month-on-month terms, there was a small rise in passenger volume, but much slower than in the previous months.

The pandemic's recent resurgence has further hit the airlines! In the second week of December about 4.6 million people tested Covid-19 positive — almost twice as many compared with two months before.