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THE FUTURE**

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COVER:
Captain Amr Abu Elenin,
chairman of EgyptAir Holding
Company, discusses new
aircraft, a new low-cost
subsidiary, new routes,
and finances.
PICTURE: BILLYPIX

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A YEAR WHEN NEW HOPE CAN TRIUMPH

As we enter a new year with new hope, the aviation industry is still suffering. According to colleagues at the African Airlines Association (AFRAA) the situation remains grim.

Latest figures showed air passenger traffic reaching 41.6% compared to the same period in 2019. Similarly, capacity reached 58%. The shortfall is explained by the ongoing travel restrictions and the low willingness of passengers to fly.

Travel to Europe and other international markets has been badly affected by new bans – many without logic. This halted the little shoots of recovery that we saw as we entered the last quarter.

Certainly, as we saw at the Dubai Airshow, African airlines are not sitting back nursing their wounds. More are investing and increasing regional (intra Africa) and intercontinental flights.

Indeed, according to AFRAA, four of the top 15 African airlines exceeded the number of their international routes than in the pre-Covid period. However, some north African airlines, like Royal Air Maroc and EgyptAir, were particularly hit by changing regulations.

Of course, congratulations are due to Ethiopian Airlines, which was one of only three carriers in the world to make a

profit in the year ending June 2021. CEO, Tewolde GebreMariam, said it was all due to “agility, quick decision-making and resilience”, but the airline was also able to make some radical moves to boost its chances of survival.

Radical steps do need to be taken if African aviation is to recover. Implementing the single African air transport market (SAATM) and showing action rather than words WILL generate benefits to all participants and will boost plans for the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Among those radical plans – and called for in my last comment piece – was the announcement of the collaboration agreement between two of the continent’s former aviation stars, South African Airways and Kenya Airways.

Both airlines have been barely limping along over the past few years, financial challenges and excessive government interference having injured potential even further.

The question now is whether domestic interference will stop, and sensible decisions on capacity be made – and, indeed, if there are the resources needed to recover.

So, as we enter the year with new optimism, please let this be a triumph of hope over expectation.

Alan Peaford, editor-in-chief

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PICTURE: BILLYPIX

All smiles as Ethiopian enjoys 75th anniversary celebration

Federico Bulato, Airbus sales director - commercial aircraft, and Ethiopian Airlines personnel celebrate the airline's 75th anniversary year at the Dubai Airshow.

The carrier's first aircraft – a Douglas C-47s procured from the US Government – departed for Egypt's capital, Cairo, via Asmara, Eritrea, in 1946.

Today, the flag-carrier, based at Addis Ababa/Bole, is Africa's largest pan-African aviation group, flying across five continents. Ethiopian Airlines took delivery of its first Airbus A350 XWB in 2016, making it Africa's first operator of the type.

Kenya 'best employer'

Kenya Airways was named as best employer brand 2021 by the LinkedIn Talent Awards.

The airline's chief people officer, Evelyn Munyoki, said: "Being recognised as a best employer in sub-Saharan Africa is humbling and a reflection of the passion of our teams to ensure we continue to live our purpose of driving sustainable development in Africa, especially at a time when so many aspects of our lives have been impacted by the global pandemic. Our people will always be at the heart of everything we do."

RAM restructure

Royal Air Maroc (RAM) is restructuring its operation in an attempt to capture some post-Covid aviation uplift.

The airline said it wishes to optimise its recent entry into the Oneworld alliance.

CEO, Hamid Addou, said: "Royal Air Maroc is reinventing itself, and we are more than ever mobilised, in this period of recovery, to face the major

challenges that await the company in the coming years."

He added: "We have completely refocused the company's strategy on the customer experience, controlled from end to end. And we have also rethought the employees' experience for a human capital that is better prepared and integrated into its environment."

A 'Rwand' welcome

Hamad International Airport (HIA) in Qatar welcomed new direct flights from Rwanda to Qatar in December, facilitated by the codeshare agreement between Qatar Airways and RwandAir.

Yvonne Makolo, RwandAir CEO said: "RwandAir is proud to partner with HIA and Qatar Airways, which will act as a

catalyst to continue our recovery and demonstrates our commitment to enhance the travelling experience for our customers."

Hürku purchase?

Turkey is looking to revive historic relationships with neighbouring Azerbaijan through the potential sale of trainer aircraft.

Azerbaijan seems to be lining up to buy the Turkish

Aerospace Hürku turboprop-powered basic trainer aircraft.

If Azerbaijan does order the Hürku, it would become the second export customer for the aircraft, following an earlier order placed by the Niger Air Force in November 2021.

Tanzania radar boost

Thales has successfully completed the delivery of an air traffic management system and radars, enhancing Tanzania's air traffic safety and efficiency.

The modernisation programme involved the installation of ATC surveillance radars and TopSky - ATC at six different locations in Tanzania, including Songwe, Dar es Salaam, Kilimanjaro, Mwanza, Zanzibar and Arusha airports.

Italian codeshare

Kenya Airways and ITA Airways, Italy's new flag-carrier, have announced a codeshare agreement. Travellers will be able to connect on the Kenya Airways' network to ITA Airways' network across Europe.



PICTURE: AIR CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Air Côte d'Ivoire happy to take a Moment

Air Côte d'Ivoire has signed a contract with Moment for the Paris-based company to provide a premium cabin experience with the deployment of its portable entertainment system Flymingo Box.

The system server guarantees smooth access to a wide range of content, including films, music, press, radio, podcasts, digital books and unparalleled streaming speed.

According to Moment, Flymingo Box is easily installed in the cabin of an aircraft and requires no intervention from the crew. The device also allows rapid distribution throughout the cabin of a single-aisle aircraft.

"We are committed to being a forward-looking airline and Moment supports us in this process," said Laurent Loukou, CEO of Air Côte d'Ivoire.

"Among all the entertainment possibilities available on the market, Moment's solution met the best of our expectations. Offering a broad range of content and services, it can evolve according to our needs to become a genuine point of contact on board."

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IATA awards first pharma certification

Ethiopian Airlines has become the first airline in Africa to be certified as an International Air Transport Association (IATA) centre of excellence for independent validators in pharmaceutical logistics (CEIV Pharma).

Group CEO, Tewolde GebreMariam, said: “With an annual capacity of more than a million tonnes, our global air cargo and logistics hub in Addis Ababa has various special cargo-handling facilities like pharma and life science, as well as live animals, perishable cargo, and dangerous goods. We have been working very hard on our facility to meet global standards.

“The IATA CEIV Pharma certification has come at an opportune time for the Ethiopian team as they continue to play a key global role in the transportation of life-saving Covid-19 vaccines around the world, particularly within Africa.”

Maintenance deal

Direct Maintenance has restarted its line maintenance activities in Africa by re-opening its facility at Kilimanjaro International Airport in Tanzania.

The move follows the maintenance service agreement between Direct Maintenance and Edelweiss, Switzerland’s leading leisure travel airline.

Direct Maintenance will



African double boost for Zela Aviation

UK-based Zela Aviation has announced a cooperation deal with Kenyan low-cost airline, Jambojet, which operates a fleet of De Havilland Canada Dash 8-Q400 aircraft. The agreement means Zela will act as an appointed agent for leasing Jambojet’s aircraft under ACMI terms and conditions (aircraft, crew, maintenance, and insurance).

Zela Aviation chairman, Andreas Christodoulides, said that cooperation of the two companies – taking into consideration the recession and the crisis caused by the pandemic – confirms the credibility of Zela Aviation in the field of air transport, among other major international airlines.

Zela Aviation has also entered into a strategic partnership with Precision Air that will allow it to act as the general representative for leasing the Tanzanian carrier’s aircraft under ACMI terms and conditions.

be providing line maintenance services for the airline’s A340 fleet in both Kilimanjaro International Airport and Abeid Amani Karume International Airport in Zanzibar. It will be performing daily, weekly and transit checks.

Sudanese training

EgyptAir Training Academy (ETA), which has been training Sudanese pilots, cabin crew, engineers and dispatchers, recently received a high-level delegation from the Sudanese Civil Aviation Authority and had its deal renewed.

Members viewed the academy’s latest simulators for pilots training on the Airbus A320, A320neo,

A220-300, A330/A340 and Boeing B737-800 and B777, in addition to the cabin crew training advanced devices including the cabin emergency evacuation trainer (CEET), and the cabin service trainer (CST).

Fragile space

The Airlines Association of Southern Africa (AASA) has warned that without urgent and coordinated government interventions, an environmentally sustainable southern African air transport industry will remain unattainable.

“We are in a fragile and vulnerable space and we urgently require governments to use the levers at their disposal to

provide the relief that airlines need if they are to continue to provide the connectivity between markets that is the lifeblood of every modern, sophisticated and aspirational country,” said AASA CEO, Aaron Munetsi.

■ New prescription for the AASA recovery, page 28.

Secure knowledge...

Dr Matarawy Sayed Matarawy and Hesham Mohammed Bekhet, from EgyptAir’s security division, have been accredited as international instructors of aviation security after successfully passing the qualifying training course for ICAO lecturers, which was held in Amman, Jordan.

UAVs make double debut at EDEX

More than 400 exhibitors attended Egypt’s showpiece defence event, EDEX, in December, with pavilions from a number of the countries keen to do business, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, France, and India.

Egypt’s own industry was also in full flow with two locally produced UAVs making their debut at the show.

The Nut drone, which was co-produced by the Arab Organization for Industrialization and the Military Technical College, was said to be capable of providing tactical reconnaissance missions both during the day and night using electro-optical technology.

Egyptian President, Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, inspected the drone, named after the ancient Egyptian goddess of the sky, on the first day of the show.

The second drone on show was the EJune-30 SW, built by the Industrial Complex Engineering Robots in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of Military Production. This appears to be the product of the industrial cooperation agreement with the UAE and is based on the Yabhon United 40 – also known as Yabhon Smart Eye 2 – from Edge Group’s Adcom. It is primarily in service with the UAE Air Force.

Derelict sale

The Kenya Airports Authority held a public auction of 73 derelict aircraft abandoned at various airports around the country.

Canada backing

Ethiopian Airlines has renewed its support for the Canada-Africa Chamber of Business, following the three-day Africa Accelerating conference.

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Airbus enhanced ACH125 in South Africa

Airbus has delivered to a private customer the first ACH125 helicopter in South Africa equipped with updated avionics and increased engine power.

The new features offer a bespoke cabin completion and assure the highest levels of comfort and safety.

The ACH125 can accommodate up to five passengers with luggage stored in three compartments.

In a passenger transport configuration, this new ACH125 is the first in the region to be delivered with a certified dual Garmin G500 TXi GDU1060 avionics suite with autopilot, enhanced traffic advisory, ADS-B in and out, and radio altimeter – all reducing pilot workload and enhancing flight safety.



▼ Our main target was simply to keep surviving. ▲
CAPTAIN AMR ABU ELENIN

EgyptAir Sphinx ahead

New aircraft and a new low-cost subsidiary are waiting in the wings for EgyptAir in 2022, but it will have to pay back large government loans and is negotiating its way through a technical problem with some new arrivals.

Alan Dron reports.

Like many airlines, EgyptAir concluded 2019 well satisfied. The company's financial year runs from July 1 to June 30 and 2019 "was the best year ever", according to Captain Amr Abu Elenin, chairman of EgyptAir Holding Company.

Then, of course, everything came to a grinding halt, as the pandemic grew from being a local problem in a little-known province of China to the greatest economic dislocation the world has seen for almost a century.

From March 19 2020, Egypt shut down its airspace to international services except for repatriation and medical flights (domestic flights continued until June 1).

Almost all airlines worldwide stopped operating, cut salaries and reduced the number of employees.

As the national flag-carrier, EgyptAir felt it had a responsibility to its staff during the pandemic, said Elenin. "We didn't fire any employees. There were no salary reductions, except for executives."

May 2022 is the 90th anniversary of EgyptAir's first flight and Elenin was determined that the airline should reach that anniversary: "Our main target was simply to keep surviving."

Support came from the Egyptian Government, but in the form of loans, as opposed to cash handouts or financial guarantees that many other airlines received from their national politicians.

The loans, totalling E£5 billion (around \$320 million) undoubtedly helped, said Elenin. But loans have to be repaid and he is in no doubt that the impact of the pandemic will be felt by the company for several years.

EgyptAir was, however, able to tap into the demand for dedicated cargo flights.

Normally, around 50% of all air cargo is carried in the holds of passenger aircraft.

With scheduled passenger flights drastically cut for much of 2020, EgyptAir operated passenger airliners in freighter mode to help move urgent freight, which led to an increase

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New beginnings: Air Sphinx will start services with two of the 29 Boeing 737-800s in EgyptAir's fleet. Two more 737-800s will follow within months, with further expansion dependent on initial progress.

PICTURE: EGYPTAIR.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

of around 50% in cargo traffic, partly through the addition of new routes.

There was a particular increase in demand for the export of Egyptian medical equipment.

Now, however, assuming Covid-19 is slowly brought under control, 2022 is looking promising.

The past decade has seen the low-cost carrier (LCC) phenomenon spread to the Middle East and EgyptAir now plans to take a stake in this.

Wherever they are introduced, LCCs tend to increase the size of the market, by encouraging new passengers to take to the air, or by allowing existing travellers to fly more frequently.

EgyptAir plans to set up a new LCC subsidiary, Air Sphinx, in April 2022. The new airline will be based at the recently opened Sphinx Airport, Giza, just west of Cairo.

Air Sphinx will start services with two of the 29 Boeing 737-800s in EgyptAir's fleet. Two more 737-800s will follow within months, with further expansion dependent on initial progress.

Egypt's domestic market has grown recently through the opening of several new airports. As well as Sphinx, airports at El Alamein and the new Egyptian capital, east of Cairo, are now in operation.

Internationally, one of EgyptAir's aims in recent years has been to expand its African network and this initiative is continuing: several new destinations are under study and Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, will be added to the network in summer 2022.

Further afield, Düsseldorf has recently been added to the route map and Dublin is on the way.

With the recent return of Russian tourists to Egypt, EgyptAir has started to operate direct flights from Moscow to the resorts of Hurghada

New A220s hit by engine problems

There has been a growing increase in Egyptian domestic passenger flows in recent years and EgyptAir has been replacing its old Embraer 170s with new A220-300 aircraft.

The carrier's regional division, EgyptAir Express, took delivery of the first new aircraft in December 2019 and the last of the 12 arrived late in 2020.

Replacing the Embraers with the Airbuses doubles the available capacity – 140 seats compared to 70.

However, further upgrades are now having to be made after the fleet experienced a significant problem with the combustion chamber of the Pratt & Whitney PW1500G engines – the only powerplant offered with the aircraft.

African Aerospace understands that this has been sufficiently serious to require the replacement of 15 of the 24 engines on the wing, with the remainder scheduled to be changed in the coming months.

A Pratt & Whitney spokeswoman confirmed: "A limited population of PW1500G engines have recently been removed from service, due to early generation hardware, with upgrades identified to bring them to the latest design standard that will increase durability and time on wing.

"We are working closely with the affected airlines to minimise disruption and return aircraft to service."

She did not give technical details of the problem, or say which other airlines were affected.

Airbus also issued a statement saying it was: "working closely with Pratt & Whitney to provide the best level of support to those of our customers impacted to ensure that disruption to their operations is minimised".

and Sharm El-Sheikh, popular beach holiday destinations for Russians seeking respite from their long, cold winters.

Tourism is a crucial revenue stream for the country and Egypt's popularity among Russians can be seen from the fact that, in the recent past, EgyptAir was offering as many as 30 weekly flights to the two Red Sea destinations.

EgyptAir's fleet is also scheduled to be updated in the next few years. At present, the airline operates 65 passenger aircraft and three freighters.

At the lower end of the size range, the remaining nine Embraer 170s (of an original 12) operated by regional division, EgyptAir Express, were offered for sale in late November 2021, with 12 replacement Airbus A220-300s now all delivered.

Additionally, said Elenin, EgyptAir needs to replace 10 wide-bodies and negotiations on replacements were ongoing. He declined to say what their replacements might be.

The company also operates six 787-9s and a further two are scheduled to be delivered by February 2023.

Recently, EgyptAir Holding Company has streamlined its organisation by merging nine of its subsidiaries into a holding company and only three subsidiaries.

This move is designed to cut costs and reduce inter-company transactions. As with the measures to combat Covid, EgyptAir aims to do this without imposing redundancies.

Services are returning to pre-Covid frequencies. Comparing October 2021 to October 2019, operations have returned to 92% of the pre-pandemic figure.

The company typically offers 60 to 70 flights a day (80 to 90 on weekends) and these are expected to increase in 2022 as the world slowly returns to normality.

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CRANE FLIES

WHY SUPPORT FOR THE NATIONAL CARRIER'S REVIVAL PLAN IS A BIG LIFT FOR UGANDA



Africa's presence at the Dubai Airshow in November was led by Uganda Airlines. Alan Peaford met the airline's CEO to find out how the 'flying crane' was back in international business.

It had been more than two decades since the 'flying crane' emblem had been seen on a Uganda Airlines aircraft outside the African continent. But the revived national carrier took to the skies with more than 200 passengers on the first step of its international rebirth plan with a maiden flight to Dubai, in the UAE.

The national carrier ceased operations in 2001 but, in 2018, the Ugandan Government announced plans to invest in aviation for the benefit of the country.

With support from local banks and the president, orders were placed for two new Airbus A330neos and four Bombardier CRJs for regional operations.

Although the aircraft were delivered on schedule, the Covid effect delayed plans. The CRJs began intra-African routes from Entebbe to neighbouring countries and to South Africa and, in October, the A330neo headed to Dubai as part of Uganda's celebrations of its 59th independence anniversary.

On board were government and airline officials for the first of the three-a-week flights to the UAE.

"This is a great beginning, and it will create opportunities and develop further cultural exchanges in addition to business and trade," said Uganda's minister of state for transport, Byamukama Fred.

The acting chief executive, Jenifer Bamuturaki, explained the rationale of the decision to make Dubai the first international sortie.

"We have a long-standing relationship between Uganda and the UAE. And one of the things that we have in common is trading – we have lots of imports and exports between the two countries. But also, the UAE had the restrictions reduced much faster than the other countries that we had in line," she said.

Bamuturaki explained there are more than 60,000 Ugandans living in the UAE. "There's lots of visiting friends and family, but also a lot of business between the two nations."

With Air Arabia also announcing in October that it was launching three flights a week from Sharjah to Entebbe, the market is very competitive. Emirates and Flydubai are also already serving the Dubai-Entebbe pairing.

□□□□□

However, Bamuturaki is confident Uganda Airlines will succeed.

"The first thing is, we are starting an airline that hasn't been around for more than 20 years. So, there's this feeling among the Ugandans that we have to support something of our own, do something patriotic. And also, when you look at our equipment, it's different. It's something that everybody wants to try out.

"So, for my Ugandan point of view, it's about being patriotic," she said. "From an airline point of view, we are known to be hospitable, friendly, and we plan to offer a direct routing.

"But, as well as offering fares that are competitive, both for cargo and passengers, what will we do differently? At the end of the day, it's about the customer experience. Everyone says to me, 'but your competition has the best customer experience'. But we are willing to have a go at it."

Airbus was delighted at the Uganda interior choice and opted to use the new airline's flagship at the centre of its display at the Dubai Airshow.

President for Middle East and Africa, Mikail Houari, said: "We went to Uganda and we found friends and partners."

He reiterated the green credentials of the A330neo. With its Rolls-Royce engines delivering 25% efficiency improvements over the competition, Bamuturaki is confident that the airline will grow as more markets open up after the Covid closures. "We were very excited when Uganda came off the 'red list' for the UK – we did a little victory dance," she said. "We are coming to London and it will be our next international route."

Internationally, she said Guangzhou can open up soon, and the airline is looking at Mumbai and Delhi.

Within Africa she sees expansion to the west coast. The airline already flies its CRJs to South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and the DRC. ▲

PICTURES: UGANDA AIRLINES

Jenifer Bamuturaki: "There's this feeling among the Ugandans that we have to support something of our own, do something patriotic."

PICTURES: UGANDA AIRLINES

REBRANDED AIRLINE AIMS TO FLY THE FLAG FOR NAMIBIA

Namibian regional operator, FlyWestair, is seeking to take on the national carrier's mantle. **Alan Dron reports.**

Namibia – a huge country with a small population – has a new claimant to the role of national airline, following the demise last year of Air Namibia.

Regional operator, FlyWestair, has rebranded as FlyNamibia as it aims to restore at least the short-haul flights of the former national carrier.

FlyWestair was established in 2019 as the south-west African nation's first privately owned airline. Parent company, Westair Aviation, started as an aircraft maintenance company in 1967.

FlyWestair operates four ERJ145 regional jets, although some are understood to be parked at present. It also has around 30 general-aviation aircraft in its fleet for services to locations such as game lodges.

The Embraers' routes link the capital, Windhoek, and three domestic destinations plus a single international destination, Cape Town, in neighbouring South Africa. FlyNamibia has said that it intends to expand its route map.

The liquidation of Air Namibia, which collapsed with heavy debts in February 2021, came as a shock to the nation, according to the business editor of Namibia's *New Era* newspaper, Edgar Brandt.

"The loss of state-owned Air Namibia was quite a devastating blow to the psyche of most Namibians. We don't really have much [in the country] and the national airline was a tremendous source of pride, not just for the people who worked for it and the support industries, but to the man in the street."

□□□□□

However, Brandt added, the airline had been consistently loss-making: "Out of its 20 years' existence, you could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times it had recorded a profit."

There was no chance that the state – which last September had to pay US lessor, Castlake, \$109.5 million in a lease termination agreement for the airline's two Airbus A330-200s – would consider setting up a replacement, he said.

At present, the only other foreign carriers serving Namibia are South Africa's Airlink and Ethiopian. This means longer international journeys for Namibian travellers usually involve a connecting flight in Cape Town, Johannesburg or Addis Ababa. ▲



Brand new: Westair Aviation launched its new FlyNamibia brand at a glitzy event in Windhoek, the country's capital. PICTURE: WESTAIR AVIATION

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The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is partnering with Africa's largest aviation group, Ethiopian Airlines, to establish a second national airline – Air Congo. **Kaleyesus Bekele** reports.

Chérubin Okende: Now, it is a question of doing everything to ensure that this project is carried out as soon as possible.
PICTURE: ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES.



All go for Air Congo in DRC/Ethiopian JV

The DRC Transport Minister, Chérubin Okende, has announced that his government is aiming to launch Air Congo as a joint venture company with Ethiopian Airlines. The government will hold a majority 51% ownership on the start-up airline, while Ethiopian Airlines will have a 49% stake, he confirmed.

Air Congo is the second national carrier for the DRC (in addition to Congo Airways) and its fleet will comprise seven aircraft.

"We already have the name of the new company. Now, it is a question of doing everything to ensure that this project is carried out as soon as possible," the minister said.

Ethiopian Airlines officials are excited to launch another pan-African airline.

Busera Awol, group VP strategic planning & alliances, said Air Congo would be the most competitive and leading airline in central and southern Africa by providing competitive, safe, reliable and customer-focused passenger and cargo transport.

"We believe that Air Congo will contribute positively to the socio-economic development of DRC and the region by providing vital regional air connectivity and discharging its corporate social responsibilities," Awol said.

According to him, Air Congo's business model is anchored on offering scheduled services to all major segments of the market, with product standards on domestic, regional, and

international services at least comparable to those offered by competing carriers in terms of on-board comfort, customer service standards, and operational integrity.

"Key to further improving financial success will be the ability to carry connecting passengers through its Kinshasa hub and certain other key airports with scheduled flights," Awol added.

Nature has endowed DRC with vast natural resources, including precious minerals such as diamond, uranium and tantalum. The country is also known for its vast equatorial forest home to mountain gorillas. There are also large Congolese diaspora communities in different parts of the world, mainly in Europe.

Due to these contributing factors there is a strong demand for air travel within the DRC, as well as the international routes, which means Ethiopian officials are optimistic about the success of Air Congo.

Awol said: "Air Congo will start by serving domestic and regional routes."

The DRC already has a national carrier, Congo Airways, which began operations in 2015. While Congo Airways is struggling to grow, the government's decision to set up a second national airline has taken many by surprise.

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Congo Airways started operation in October 2015, initially serving eight domestic destinations, including Goma, Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, before expanding to provide regional and international services with A320 aircraft.

Ownership of the airline is divided between the government and local investors, foreign shareholders, and the airline's employees, with \$35 million in initial capital. Air France Consulting assisted with preparations.

The airline has not yet started making a profit and some critics wonder why the DRC Government has moved to set up another national airline while Congo Airways is struggling to scale up.

Despite the criticism, Okende seems to be in a rush to establish the new national airline. "We have no more time to waste. The Congolese people are waiting for concrete actions," he said.

Some aviation experts support the government's decision.

One, based in Uganda, argued: "Ethiopian is the most successful airline in Africa and it has the expertise in establishing airlines in joint venture agreements in other African countries."

Ethiopian has successfully established Askya Airlines in Togo Lome, and other pan-African Airlines in Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique and Chad.

One of the key overarching strategies of Ethiopian Airlines' vision 2025, a 15-year growth roadmap, is the multiple-hub strategy. "We believe that creating multiple hubs is a win-win strategy for a huge continent like Africa as it avails critical air connectivity across the continent with common service standards," Awol said.

According to him, the creation of multiple hubs also enables African carriers to increase their market share in the continent and enhances traffic development in the region. He believes that it creates job opportunities and is a catalyst for the transfer of knowledge and expertise.

It also acts as an instrument for the realisation of the single African air transport market (SAATM).



"We believe that Air Congo will contribute positively to the socio-economic development of DRC and the region."
Busera Awol

PICTURE: ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES



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Both new and existing African airlines are showing that it is possible to operate successfully and exploit new openings, despite long-standing difficulties including high visa costs, patchy infrastructure and poor regional connectivity.

Alan Dron reports.

African airlines en route to new heights

Gabon-bound: Three ATR72-600s were acquired by Gabon's Afrijet, which operates to a number of airports throughout Cameroon, Gabon, and São Tomé.

PICTURE: ATR.



Is African aviation finally about to see its long-promised potential come to fruition? Aircraft manufacturers and airlines all believe that, after several false dawns over the past 20 years, genuine improvements in operating conditions – both in infrastructure and the continent's political environment – are finally within grasp.

An airline symposium staged by Embraer, immediately before November's Dubai Airshow, brought together a cluster of African airlines, both established carriers and start-up companies, who talked of their plans for expansion.

Additionally, the air show was notable for a batch of orders for the continent's airlines.

Airbus took a firm order from Nigeria's Ibom Air for 10 A220s; another Nigerian carrier, Overland Airways, ordered three Embraer 175s and took three more purchase rights for the regional jet; ATR bagged three ATR72-600s from Gabon's Afrijet; and Boeing landed an Air Tanzania order for single examples of the 787-8 and 767-300F freighter, plus two 737MAXes.

So, are there signs that Africa's potential is finally starting to crystallise?

"There are, actually," said Hussein Dabbas, Embraer's general manager, Africa & Middle East. "First of all, we're seeing that GDP in the continent is rising by around 2.9% together with an estimated 3.8% rise in revenue passenger kilometres (RPK) during the period 2019-2040. This is good news that indicates that growth is there, definitely. Is it going as far as it should? I

The write stuff:
Afrijet's Marc Gaffajoli (right) and ATR's Stefano Bortoli at the ATR 72-600 order signing.

PICTURE: BILLYPIX.



think not. There's still some room for improvement."

However, he added: "Governments are becoming more aviation-savvy. We are seeing a lot of airport infrastructure improvement projects."

Mikai Houari, president, Airbus Africa and Middle East, agreed. "The African aviation market was very promising before the crisis and we remain optimistic as all of the fundamental drivers for air transport are present," he said.

Randy Heisey, Boeing's managing director commercial marketing, Middle East and Africa, also concurred. "I'm seeing signs of change," he said.

There is a direct correlation between growth in economies and aviation. With growth in the continent's economy, plus economic

diversification and a growing middle class, "All of these together lead to passenger travel growth," said Heisey.

Houari pointed out: "Over the past 20 years, out of the 20 top worldwide economic performers, more than half were African economies. The increased demand for air transport is a reflection of that growth.

"The impact that the aviation industry has had on the sustainable development of Africa cannot be overstated, and governments across the continent are leveraging on the industry's ability to bring about economic transformation."

Of course, political factors have to be taken into account. For years, intra-African traffic has



Done deal: (from left) Christian Scherer, chief commercial officer and head of Airbus International; Mfon Udom, Ibom Air chief executive officer; and Udom Gabriel Emmanuel, Governor of Akwa Ibom State.

PICTURE: BILLYPIX.

been held back by the difficulty of getting visas to fellow-African countries, governmental protectionism of national carriers, and high taxes on passengers, fuel and airport services.

The Yamoussoukro Decision of 1999 and the more recent single African air transport market (SAATM) were supposed to end those restraints on aviation and bring about an African 'open skies' scenario. Until now, progress has been slow.

That is starting to change, said Dabbas. "However, the implementation is not moving at the pace it was intended to. Airlines are still restricted; they don't have the frequencies or traffic rights needed to grow."

Airlines competing aggressively with each

other don't support each other, he added. "At a conference in Nairobi [recently], I said that African airlines should look at establishing an African alliance like the major three [airline] alliances, where they could work together and support each other. We're seeing that in Europe, Asia and the US.

"I think the major issue African carriers really need to work on is to create proper hubs and spokes."

Houari said significant improvements to travel in the continent have been made in recent years. "Policies like free travel and visa liberalisation are also key," he explained. "Rwanda implemented a visa-on-arrival system in 2013 that enables

African nationals to stay in the country for up to 90 days and, since then, has seen the number of visitors increase by more than 100%," he said.

Progress in projects such as SAATM has obviously been derailed by the pandemic, but Houari believes: "With difficulty comes opportunity, and the current Covid crisis might encourage better collaboration and integration in Africa. African carriers could choose to join forces, thus increasing competitiveness, creating regional hubs and, ultimately, speeding up the full implementation of initiatives such as SAATM."

The initiative is starting to have an effect, agreed Heisey. "Certainly, those states that are participating are seeing improvements."

Although the pandemic had put a speed bump in the way of progress, increased connectivity had been seen among those states that had signed up to SAATM.

One aspect of connectivity that is starting to change for the better is an increase in frequencies between African destinations. "60% of routes are still served with less than one daily frequency," said Dabbas. "This isn't good for either the countries' economies or passengers."

Flying to somewhere two or three times a week, as often happened in the past, is no longer sufficient or acceptable, he added. "If you don't fly daily, you don't count. People want to travel when they want to go, not when the airlines want to fly."

That means the picture in the

Continued on Page 20

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

continent is still mixed. “The first thing we’re seeing growing is domestic traffic in Africa. Of course, not every country has got domestic networks, but if you look at South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria etc, you can see very big growth,” said Dabbas.

“But we’re still seeing inter-regional flights at the minimum. They’re still very small compared to domestic and international services. Only 9% is inter-regional traffic in a continent of more than a 1 billion people.”

Much depends on having the right size of aircraft, said Dabbas. “Some 97% of flights in Africa are departing with less than 150 passengers. That means that every aircraft bigger than that has a lot of empty seats. Wide-body aircraft that are operating within Africa are 14% of the total. That means many have low load factors.

“When you the have right-sized aircraft, you can have good load factors; that’s where it becomes operationally beneficial. Smaller aircraft mean you can fly to secondary destinations and connect secondary to secondary.

“So, I think regional jets are extremely important to connect the continent with itself. We’re seeing that in South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia and Nigeria.”

He said one Nigerian carrier flying regional jets described them as “cash machines”, with 35-minute turnarounds and low operating costs. “It’s all about frequency. As they say: ‘If you build it, they will come.’”

Houari also believes that the right size of aircraft is important, with the A220’s flexibility allowing it to handle domestic, intra-African or international services at the lower end of the scales and the A330neo well-positioned in range and capacity terms for the larger end of the African market.

All the manufacturers detect an increase in start-ups. It is common for entrepreneurs to seize the opportunities presented by a major downturn in business, said Heisey.

“Starting fresh without the heavy burdens of debt and old structures, north Africa, Nigeria, and all of west Africa is a hotbed of people starting airlines.”

Frequently, however, he noted, start-ups will select used equipment to ease their capital burden.

He was cautious on the prospects for airline consolidation or mergers. While they could work, “not every marriage ends successfully”.

There was agreement that airlines from outside Africa would continue to have a significant role in the continent. This may not be confined to siphoning off passengers from African carriers. Middle East carriers traditionally recruited skilled aviation personnel from Africa, said Heisey, and this was likely to continue. ▲

*Embraer’s airline symposium, prior to the start of the Dubai Airshow, was notable for bringing together many smaller airlines from the African continent. A trio of them spoke to **African Aerospace**.*

THREE REASONS TO BE OPTIMISTIC

CASE STUDY 1: SAHEL AVIATION SERVICE

Privately owned Sahel Aviation Service (SAS) was initially known as Mission Aviation Fellowship, a UK-based religious group. Its activities gradually changed into a more commercial operation and it has been part of the aviation landscape in west Africa since 1988.

Based in Bamako, Mali, it has out-stations in N’Djamena (Chad), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and Niamey (Niger) handling a wide range of charter and contract operations.

A major initial source of revenue was providing transport for mining companies in the region. Providing charter services for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the World Health Organization, International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian groups is also now a major activity.

The company operates a wide range of aircraft: Beech 1900D and 1900Cs handle mining contract work and are increasingly used for NGO services, with four being operated in medevac layouts.

Three Antonov An-26s are used for defence sector operations, transporting UN peacekeeping forces and cargo into rough airstrips. An Embraer 145 is used on a weekly schedule to Johannesburg as well as charter operations, while two Cessna Citation III business jets are operated as VIP transports and for ferrying precious metals obtained from the region’s mining operations.

CASE STUDY 2: NIGER AIRLINES

For several years now, Niger Airlines, the sole carrier in the large African nation, has operated with two Fokker 50 turboprops leased from Palestinian Airlines. However, the decision by the Palestinian Government to suspend its national airline’s services meant that Niger Airlines’ director-general, Abdoul Aziz Larabou, and his team had to find replacements quickly in order to keep services operating.

A replacement pair of F50s has been acquired – owned, this time – but the aim is to introduce more modern ATR 72 turboprops plus a pair of Embraer 190 regional jets, in order to expand out of the purely domestic role that the company has filled in recent years.

“We’re profitable, because we are growing,” said Larabou.

The airline’s passengers consist of a mix of businesspeople, government and NGO officials, together with patients heading for medical treatment. There is also a certain amount of tourist traffic to the capital, Niamey, and Agadez, in the Sahara, also attracts business travellers. ▲

▼ Providing charter services for NGOs and other humanitarian groups is now a major activity. ▲

CASE STUDY 3: DLIMI AIRLINES



Hamza Dlimi: Confident he has spotted a niche in the market. PICTURE: BILLYPIX.

Basing a new airline’s business plan on attracting kitesurfers to a remote stretch of the Moroccan coast may seem risky, but Hamza Dlimi is confident he has spotted a niche in the market.

The man behind start-up, Dlimi Airlines, comes from the southern Moroccan city of Dakhla and has been aware for years that his home town is a potential major attraction for watersports enthusiasts.

“It’s a great destination,” he said. “Dakhla is one of the new destinations for tourism in Morocco. It gets 300 days of wind a year.”

Those conditions rival Asia and Brazil for all types of surfers, said Dlimi, and had in recent years attracted notables such as former US president Barack Obama and UK airline entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson.

The Moroccan Government is encouraging investors to build hotels in the city. Additionally, the existing small international airport serving it (the Canary Islands and Paris are already in the timetable) is scheduled to be significantly expanded in the next few years to give it an annual capacity of 1 million passengers.

Dlimi hopes to get in on Dakhla’s expanding tourism sector at an early stage. There are two main markets, domestic and international, and he makes the point that it is the nearest kite-surfing hotspot to Europe.

His planned airline is still in the start-up phase, having applied for an operating licence from the Moroccan authorities. Favoured initial equipment is the Embraer 195 E2 regional jet and he is in contact with the Brazilian airframer on these: “We would start with two aircraft and see how we go.”

One vision for the new carrier is to connect west Africa with Brazil. ▲

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Two of Africa's largest carriers – South African Airways (SAA) and Kenya Airways (KQ) – have signed an historic strategic partnership agreement that should enable them to jointly establish a new pan-African airline by next year. **Kaleyesus Bekele** reports.

Out of the flying pan – into the future...

It is a measure of the importance of the new strategic partnership framework that the signing, in Johannesburg on November 23, was witnessed by both countries' presidents – Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya and Cyril Ramaphosa. KQ chairman, Michael Joseph, and SAA chairman, John Lamola, were the men actually putting pen to paper.

The partnership framework follows a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) that the airlines signed in September 2021 to foster the exchange of knowledge, expertise, innovation, digital technologies, and best practice.

Officials say the new deal will see both airlines working together to increase passenger traffic, cargo opportunities, and general trade, by taking advantage of strengths in South Africa, Kenya, and Africa as a whole. SAA denied that the airlines would be merging after Kenya's President, Uhuru Kenyatta, had suggested in his New Year's message that they were poised to join forces in order to overcome the economic difficulties that both face.

According to company officials, the partnership will improve the financial viability of the two airlines, with customers benefitting from a more competitive price offering for both passenger and cargo segments.

Lamola said the partnership would create the most formidable air transport connection in Africa, with attractive hubs in Johannesburg and Nairobi. "It will ignite the Kenya and South Africa tourism circuits, which account for significant portions of the respective countries' GDP."

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The carriers believe the move aligns well with the aspirations of the Africa continental free trade area agreement (AfCFTA) of providing a single market for goods and services, facilitated by movement of people and goods, to deepen the economic integration and prosperity of the African continent.

"It also includes cost containment strategies, which will aid the recovery of both carriers in an increasingly competitive African airline environment," they added in a statement.

Joseph said: "The geo location of the two countries will make the pan-African airline group attractive."

SAA resumed flights in September after a year-long hiatus, while KQ has been a loss-making airline in recent consecutive years. The managements of both carriers say they remain committed to their financial turnaround strategy, stressing the partnership's significance in achieving their goals. "One of the pillars to achieve this is coming together and combining assets to provide a more robust and, ultimately, competitive aviation ecosystem to pursue the commercial viability of both carriers," they said.

KQ CEO, Allan Kilavuka, said the future of aviation and its long-term sustenance is hinged on partnership and



Putting pen to paper: John Lamola and Michael Joseph sign the strategic partnership agreement. PICTURE: CENTRAL TV.

collaboration. "This agreement will enhance customer benefits by creating a larger combined passenger and cargo network; foster the exchange of expertise, innovation, and best practice; and adopt home-grown organic solutions to technical and operational challenges," he enthused.

SAA's interim CEO, Thomas Kgokolo, added: "As well as being a strong local carrier, part of our broader growth strategy is to become a major player in regional travel, and this joint memorandum with Kenya Airways, one of the continent's strongest and most respected carriers, will do just that.

"Part of SAA's core remit is to be a significant enabler of business and trade in Africa and it's through a strategic understanding like this that real progress will be made in advancing South Africa and the continent's growth."

According to Kgokolo, the deal will help improve customer experience by offering a wider range of choices and destinations. He said the cooperation would also help in the standardisation of product and service offerings, in line with current global aviation trends.

"Working with Kenya Airways will also harness internal resources and capacities, leading to sustainable and cost-effective growth. This includes shared services in the areas of route networks, fleet, and capacity deployment; exploring economic, technical, as well as maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) opportunities to achieve economies of scale," he said.

The ownership structure, source of funding, and many other vital issues required for the birth of the new pan-African airline are yet to be determined. SAA is a Star Alliance Group member, while KQ is a Sky Team member.

In 1995, a similar pan-African airline – Alliance Air – was established by the governments of South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. It ceased operation in 2000.

Only time will tell if the new venture will succeed this time. ▲



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Face aux impacts considérables de la crise qui affecte le transport aérien dans les îles de l'Alliance Vanille, Air Austral et Corsair ont lancé un projet de coopération commerciale, ce qui remet en question l'efficacité de la coopération régionale de ce secteur dans l'océan Indien. Le point avec **Vincent Chappard**.

L'ALLIANCE VANILLE EST-ELLE MISE À MAL?

Air Austral et Corsair ont décidé d'engager des discussions pour conclure un accord de coopération commerciale sur leurs routes entre la France vers l'océan Indien.

En unissant leurs forces, elles souhaitent proposer un programme de vols renforcé, des connexions plus riches grâce aux réseaux cumulés, une offre tarifaire élargie et plus compétitive, et également une offre Fret améliorée.

« Ce projet d'envergure permettra le déploiement d'une offre de services enrichie au bénéfice des passagers de l'océan Indien, tout en améliorant la rentabilité économique des opérations grâce à la mise en commun de moyens et la mise en œuvre de synergies », souligne Pascal de Izaguirre, président-directeur général de Corsair.

Certaines voix politiques et syndicales redoutent cependant que ce rapprochement commercial se transforme en une fusion même si les deux parties ont indiqué que ce projet de coopération commerciale préservera l'identité et l'indépendance des deux compagnies aériennes.

Il est intéressant de noter que les deux compagnies doivent à la fois faire face à la persistance de la crise sanitaire et à la stratégie d'expansion d'Air France sur les DOM TOM. Cette situation nécessite notamment pour Air Austral de trouver des moyens supplémentaires. La compagnie a enregistré des pertes de 76 millions d'euros au terme de l'exercice 2020-2021. « Nous avons négocié des prêts garantis par l'État en 2020. Le retour à l'équilibre ne sera pas pour l'exercice 2021-2022 », affirme son PDG Marie Joseph Malé.

À noter que Corsair était déjà dans une situation très difficile avant la crise du Covid-19. Son sauvetage a été permis grâce à un apport de capitaux des nouveaux actionnaires (Outre-mer R Plane), TUI ainsi que l'État par le biais d'un PGE de 150 millions d'euros et des subventions pour financer ses avions.

L'avenir d'Air Austral devra donc être tranché par ses actionnaires et également l'État français qui a mis également sous perfusion Air France, Air Austral et Corsair. Le rapprochement

commercial est engagé. En attendant un rapprochement capitalistique ou une fusion ? La question reste ouverte.

De son côté, Marc Rochet, président de French Bee entrouvre lui aussi la porte à une entente avec Air Austral. « Mettons les choses sur la table et travaillons de façon rationnelle. Peut-être qu'il y a des solutions à trouver, notamment en matière de coopération commerciale ».

Les synergies ! C'étaient pourtant l'essence même des îles de l'Alliance Vanille. Ce concept a été lancé en 2010 pour promouvoir le tourisme dans les îles de l'océan Indien. L'Alliance Vanille fut créée en 2015 avec le soutien de la



PICTURE: FRÉDÉRIC VANDENTORREN

Commission de l'Océan Indien. Cet accord entre Air Madagascar, Air Mauritius, Air Austral et Air Seychelles visait à l'amélioration de la desserte aérienne entre les pays de l'indiaocéanie comme à l'international ainsi que le déploiement de synergies fortes entre les différentes compagnies : recherche de formules tarifaires attractives, connectivité des programmes, optimisation des partages de codes et la mise en commun de moyens. Des avancées ont été faites en particulier sur le Pass Vanille.

Une politique cohérente, régionale et ouverte devaient alors pousser à davantage de coopération, d'entente voire un mouvement de fusion ou encore la création d'un marché régional.

Or, cette coopération a commencé à battre de l'aile en 2020 avec le protocole d'accord entérinant la fin définitive du partenariat



PICTURE: CORSAIR



Marie Joseph Malé: « Nous avons négocié des prêts garantis par l'État en 2020. Le retour à l'équilibre ne sera pas pour l'exercice 2021-2022 »

PICTURE: AIR AUSTRAL

▼ Ce projet d'envergure permettra le déploiement d'une offre de services enrichie au bénéfice des passagers de l'océan Indien. ▲
PASCAL DE IZAGUIRRE



PICTURE: AIR AUSTRAL

stratégique en Air Austral et Air Madagascar. La crise du Covid-19 a mis en évidence l'extrême fragilité des compagnies aériennes de la région.

Air Mauritius a été placée sous administration volontaire en avril 2020. Elle vient d'en sortir en octobre 2021 au prix d'un sauvetage de l'état mauricien de 240 millions d'euros, d'une réduction drastique de son réseau et de sa flotte d'avions de même qu'une révision de ses ressources humaines.

Plus au nord, le gouvernement malgache a approuvé en octobre dernier la mise sous protection de la loi sur les faillites d'Air Madagascar. En redressement judiciaire, la compagnie a été rebaptisée Madagascar Airlines. Elle opère aujourd'hui en affrétant des avions d'Air Europa ou d'Ethiopian Airlines.

Enfin, Air Seychelles a été renationalisée après un accord signé avec Etihad. Selon son nouveau

DG, Capitaine Sandy Benoit le plan de relance d'Air Seychelles consiste à saisir les opportunités dans le rayon de vol de ses A320neo pour rechercher les meilleurs moyens de compenser les pertes de revenus subies pendant les périodes non opérationnelles.

Face à cette situation alarmante du transport aérien dans la région, pourquoi la coopération régionale, l'entraide et les synergies n'ont pas fonctionné pour limiter cette hémorragie ? Le partenariat entre Corsair et Air Austral sonnerait-il le glas de l'Alliance Vanille ?

Pourtant, les instances internationales (IATA, ACI et OACI) de même que les analystes mettent encore aujourd'hui l'accent sur l'importance de la coopération entre les acteurs, partenaires et décideurs pour assurer une reprise pérenne du transport aérien voire renouer avec la croissance dans l'ère post-Covid.

Il est aujourd'hui grand temps de rassembler les forces et travailler de manière intégrée et cohérente. Les constats sont les mêmes hier et aujourd'hui : les compagnies aériennes de la région ont perdu du temps dans le passé car elles ont essayé de se développer toute seule alors qu'elles gagneraient aujourd'hui à se reconstruire ou à se consolider ensemble.

De nombreuses compagnies aériennes n'ont pas survécu ou ne survivront en Afrique ou dans le monde. Le moment est venu de mettre de côté les différences et de capitaliser sur les atouts de chacune des compagnies et de îles dans le respect de leurs spécificités. Il faudra aussi mettre les moyens financiers nécessaires pour relever les acteurs du transport aérien notamment ceux des Iles Vanilles, qui sont et resteront un maillon vital pour le développement de l'économie et du tourisme dans la région.

SUMMARY

COULD NEW DEAL UNDERMINE THE VANILLA ALLIANCE?

Air Austral, the flag-carrier of the French region of Réunion, and France-based Corsair have begun talks to conclude a commercial cooperation agreement on their routes between France and the Indian Ocean. The question is, asks Vincent Chappard, what might the effect be on the Vanilla Alliance regional cooperation?

By joining forces commercially, the two carriers want to offer a strengthened flight programme with enhanced connections, utilising their combined networks.

They believe they will offer a more competitive fare structure and also an improved freight service.

"This large-scale project will benefit passengers, while improving the economic profitability of operations through the pooling of resources and maximisation of synergies," explained Pascal de Izaguirre, chairman and CEO of Corsair.

However, some political and trades union voices fear that this commercial linkage will morph into a full merger, even though both parties say that this current project will preserve the identity and independence of both airlines.

Both companies are currently dealing with the pandemic, as well as with Air France's expansion strategy into France's overseas departments and territories.

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These challenges have already required Air Austral to seek additional resources. The company recorded losses of €76 million (\$85.66m) at the end of the 2020-2021 financial year.

"We negotiated government loans in 2020 but the return to a positive balance sheet will not be during the 2021-2022 fiscal year," said CEO, Marie Joseph Malé.

Corsair was already in a precarious financial position before the Covid-19 crisis and its rescue was facilitated by an injection of cash from new shareholders, as well as through state support of €150 million (\$169.07m), and additional subsidies to finance aircraft purchases.

France has already put Air France, Air Austral and Corsair on support packages so, while the commercial linkage is under way, how likely is a full merger?

Marc Rochet, president of low-cost carrier, French Bee, has also opened the door to Air Austral. "Let's put things on the table and work rationally. Maybe there are solutions to be found, especially for a commercial cooperation," he said.

The question remains open but, with other negative commercial forces acting on the Indian Ocean's Vanilla Alliance airlines, the future must be in some doubt.

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air transport

TRANSPORT AÉRIEN



Rui Carreira: The AFRAA president struck an optimistic note. PICTURE: BILLYPIX.

African Airlines Association (AFRAA) president and TAAG Angola CEO, Rui Carreira, struck an optimistic note in his AGM opening speech on November 16, observing that 2021 “brought some relief compared to last year.” Little did he know that just seven days later, all eyes would be on South Africa and the new Omicron Covid-19 variant. **Victoria Moores** reports.

Let’s see action – not just words

There appeared to be a shift in tone at the 2021 AFRAA AGM, with signs that the continent is finally working to get some age-old issues unstuck.

Each year, African aviation delegates meet. Each year the same problems – and solutions – are discussed. High costs and poor connectivity lead to thin demand. More cooperation and liberalisation are needed. A year later, a decade later, the same conversation is repeated.

“Our industry is still trying to find the right number of consumers. This is our challenge at the moment, not the number of airlines,” said Air Senegal CEO, Ibrahima Kane.

However, two new initiatives that were raised create a glimmer of hope that this cycle might be broken. They relate to two road blocks – liberalisation and taxation.

“We have already started addressing the issue of taxes and charges,” African Union (AU) Commission senior policy officer for air transport, infrastructure & energy, Eric Ntagengerwa, told delegates.

The AU asked the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC) to run a series of workshops aimed at discussing the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) taxes and charges policies with AU member states and Africa’s economic blocs.

“The main objective was to see why member states are not implementing these ICAO policies. Those workshops came up with recommendations, which are going to be our first priority next year (2022), seeing how we can tackle this issue in a coordinated way,” Ntagengerwa said.

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The recommendations were adopted by the AU transport ministers in June 2021. Ntagengerwa said that all stakeholders will be involved, including finance ministries.

He flagged intra-African connectivity as “another important challenge”, but this is another area that appears to be seeing some meaningful action.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) and consultancy firm, InterVISTAS, have performed a ground-breaking study for the AU, shining a light on the realities of intra-African liberalisation. The project involved combing through every clause of 607 bilateral agreements. Only 39% of these complied with the Yamoussoukro Decision

(YD), which became legally binding for 44 African countries in 2002.

“It is clear that we are not even where we thought we were, exchanging the most basic freedom rights. Third and fourth [freedoms] are not even widely exchanged,” AFCAC director of air transport, Angeline Simana, said. “It is a crisis. And we need to do something about it.”

The report names and shames the best and worst performing countries, but, more importantly, it analyses how ready countries really are to open their markets. This revealed that 13 countries already have the right conditions, 12 needed to address some shortcomings, while 10 will need significant improvements because they do not meet ICAO minimum standards.

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Beyond these two core projects, two other initiatives were announced. AFRAA is creating a stakeholders LAB, with the aim of cutting air fares to a third of 2019 levels and increasing African trade by 50% by 2025.

It plans to convene the first meeting of the LAB by the end of March 2022, with participants from the AU, AFCAC and the African Aviation Industry Group (AAIG).

Separately, AAIG called for the formation of an ICAO air services negotiation event (ICAN) for Africa, called AfCAN, to spur the continent’s development.

“It’s important that all the initiatives at some point come together, so that we don’t have multiple initiatives happening and we’re all trying to solve the same problem,” South African Tourism acting CEO, Sthembiso Dlamini, said.

She added that all this research and “endless workshops” need to result in action and accountability.

“What we have always lacked as a continent and what we have always failed to do is actually hold each other accountable,” agreed IATA director for government, legal & industry affairs, Raphael Kuuci.

The question is whether anything will be different by the time that Air Senegal hosts the AFRAA AGA in November 2022. Africa is asking why – and that is a concrete step forward – but the continent is running out of time for repeated talk and no action.



“Our industry is still trying to find the right number of consumers.”
Ibrahima Kane

PICTURE: BILLYPIX

Former South African Airways executive, Aaron Munetsi, has led his first Airlines Association of Southern Africa (AASA) annual general assembly following the retirement of 20-year veteran Chris Zwiegenthal and a two-month CEO tenure by former Comair executive Wrenelle Stander. **Victoria Moores** reports.

A NEW PRESCRIPTION FOR THE AASA RECOVERY

New AASA CEO Aaron Munetsi – a man known for his colourful metaphors – has urged stakeholders to swallow some bitter pills and prioritise industry health during his first annual general assembly (AGA) address as head of the association.

“We’ve survived major existential threats before, and we will survive this one too. With the right medicine, interventions and support, the prognosis is good for our recovery,” Munetsi told more than 175 AASA online delegates.

He observed that industry health is being driven by Covid-19 vaccination rates, which vary across the region.

South Africa’s adult-vaccination rate had hit 30%, but roll-out rates were slowing. Meanwhile, Zimbabwe and Botswana had achieved a 20% vaccination, but Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique’s rates varied between 0.8 and 6%. “There is still a long way to go,” Munetsi said.

Scheduled capacity in southern Africa remains 45.7% down on October 2019 and almost 43% down on January 2020.

“Our region is the second-worst affected worldwide after south-east Asia, where supply is still more than 70% down on pre-Covid levels. Our performance is, no doubt, skewed by the radical down-sizing of South African Airways (SAA) and the exits of both SA Express and Air Namibia,” Munetsi added.

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African connectivity remains at just 10% of 2019 levels. SAA interim CEO, Thomas Kgokolo, believes industry fragmentation is causing this problem. “I would like to see much deeper cooperation, not at a top level, but more at an implementation level,” he said, possibly hinting at SAA’s recent cooperation agreement with Kenya Airways.

Adding to these challenges, jet fuel prices have more than doubled over the past year. Meanwhile, South Africa’s international and domestic air services councils had been unable to function since April, blocking South African carriers from starting new routes.

However, Munetsi is an optimist and his wide-ranging medical assessment came with a “clear and legible” prescription.

He called for “sensible” Covid-19 measures, such as universal vaccine, testing and certification standards, as well as an end to curfews. “This is no time for arbitrary measures, unique and expensive tests, and unverifiable certificates,” he said.

Munetsi called on governments to provide cross-industry financial support, but he described free bailouts without reform as “unpalatable and unaffordable”. Instead, he favoured the western model of short-term government funding in exchange for airline equity or guarantees, along with tax and fees relief.

Other areas for action include full implementation of both the 2001 Cape Town Convention, to reduce aircraft-financing costs, and the single African air transport market (SAATM), which could help and improve Africa connectivity.

“The African Union has set 2025 as its deadline for SAATM’s full implementation,” he said. “How long are governments prepared to hold their citizens and their economies hostage? One would think the past 32 years was more than enough time for talking. It’s now time for implementation.”

Munetsi also flagged a potential role for Africa in the shift away from fossil fuels. “We have some of the largest deposits and reserves of lithium and cobalt, which are needed for batteries, as well as abundant platinum, sunshine and wind, which are needed to produce and catalyse hydrogen,” he said.

Rolls-Royce regional marketing executive EMEA, Jason Sutcliffe, also suggested that electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft (eVTOLs) could offer huge potential for African infrastructure. “That’s where we could have a generational leap,” he said.

Plans are now under way for an in-person AASA AGA in 2022, hosted by Airlink. ▲

■ Aaron Munetsi joined SAA in 2008 and rose through the ranks to become acting chief commercial officer before his 2018 departure. He then gained industry body experience as African Airlines Association (AFRAA) director for government, legal and industry affairs. After a year in consultancy, he accepted the role as AASA CEO.



PICTURE: AASA



ILLUSTRATION: VECTORSTOCK

Africa’s free spirits - one year on

Chukwu Emeke evaluates how things are working out so far in the African continental free trade area (AfCFTA).

The AfCFTA agreement was signed by African Union member countries on March 21, 2018, and came into force on May 30, 2019.

Trade under AfCFTA was scheduled for launch on July 1, 2020, but was pushed back after the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns made physical presence negotiations impossible. Consequently, it was on January 1 last year that the trading initiative was officially launched.

Some 35 of the African Union’s 54 member countries have, so far, ratified the agreement.

Ghana’s president, Nana Akufo-Addo, said at the launch that Africa, under AfCFTA, was emerging with a sense of urgency and purpose in the aspiration to become self-reliant. AfCFTA secretary general, Wamkele Mene, described its implementation as Africa’s needed post-pandemic stimulus.

AfCFTA aims to bring together 1.3 billion people in a \$3.4 trillion economic bloc, expected to be the largest free trade area since the establishment of the World Trade Organization.

Francis Anatogu, executive secretary of Nigeria’s action committee on AfCFTA, noted that intra-Africa trade currently flows at 15% and Africa is looking to double its share of world trade from 3% to 6% over the next 20 years.

Anatogu said Nigeria, which signed the deal in 2019, has a strategic objective “to capture 10% of Africa’s imports and double the country’s export revenues by 2035”.

AfCFTA agreement implementation has the possibility of driving increased air cargo and passenger movement within Africa and also to take the continent beyond the current 3% contribution to global passenger traffic. This however, largely depends on the speed of recovery from the pandemic’s effects, as countries like South Africa, with persistent lockdowns, may still not allow trade movement.

In east Africa, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda have ratified AfCFTA with the African Union. They were expected to dismantle barriers to cross-border trade by beginning a reduction in their tariffs. This started with a linear reduction on 90% of tariff lines and aims to lead to the elimination of tariffs on intra-regional imports over a five-year period.

Ghana, South Africa and Egypt are among countries that have established the necessary customs information for trading under AfCFTA. Indeed, 41 of the 54 member states have submitted tariff reduction schedules.

Ghana-based Ziad Hamoni, a founding member and past president of Borderless Alliance, an award-winning, private sector-led, multi-stakeholder, regional trade advocacy organisation that promotes economic integration in west Africa and the free movement of goods and people, believes that finalising those schedules and communicating them to business must be done quickly.

Africa’s airport infrastructure and aviation system challenges, political unrest, excessive bureaucracies, and high airport tariffs, still remain factors to contend with.

The pace of implementation has been slow so far but stakeholders know that economic integration is not just an event, but a process that must begin from somewhere. One year into the trading situation, it is still very early days. ▲

SOMMAIRE

L’AFCFTA SOUFFLE SA PREMIÈRE BOUGIE

Un an après le lancement officiel de la zone de libre-échange continentale africaine (AfCFTA), **Chukwu Emeke** fait le point sur l’avancée du commerce.

L’AfCFTA a été signé par les pays membres de l’Union africaine le 21 mars 2018. Il est entré en vigueur le 30 mai 2019.

L’initiative concernant le commerce n’a pris son envol qu’au premier janvier 2021. 35 des 54 ont à ce jour ratifié l’accord. En Afrique de l’Est, Djibouti, l’Éthiopie, le Kenya, le Rwanda et l’Ouganda l’ont ratifié.

L’AfCFTA vise à rassembler 1,3 milliard d’individus au sein d’un bloc économique de 3 400 milliards de dollars, soit la plus grande zone de libre-échange depuis la création de l’OMC.

Selon Francis Anatogu, secrétaire exécutif du

comité d’action du Nigeria sur l’AfCFTA, l’Afrique cherche à doubler sa part du commerce mondial de 3% à 6% au cours des 20 prochaines années.

La mise en œuvre de l’accord AfCFTA pourrait entraîner une croissance du fret aérien en Afrique et amener le continent au-delà de sa contribution actuelle de 3% au trafic mondial de passagers.

Cependant, cela dépend en grande partie de la résilience des pays face aux effets de la pandémie. Il faut également résoudre les problématiques comme l’infrastructure aéroportuaire et les défis de l’aviation, l’instabilité politique, la bureaucratie excessive et les tarifs aéroportuaires élevés.



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Nigeria has one of the largest private jet markets in the world but, asks **Chukwu Emeke**, does the country have the right policies to maximise the benefit?

SEEING RED

NIGERIA'S PRIVATE JET OPERATORS CALL FOR HELP OVER BUREAUCRACY

ILLUSTRATION: AFRICAN AEROSPACE

As Nigeria's aviation sector gradually recovers from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, private jet operators are contending with decisions on the new realities and advocating a more favourable policy environment to sustain this market.

In August 2015, Nigeria had no fewer than 146 private jets. However this had reduced to less than 100 by August 2021, with only about 45 being active.

With lockdowns and the inability to use the aircraft since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, maintenance and other costs have risen.

Air Operator's Certificate (AOC) holders of private Gulfstream jets, Hawker series, Challenger Global 5000, and Falcon 7x jets in the country include top politicians, business moguls, and even pastors. However, many of the luxury jets are not in operation and are building up heavy fees on a daily basis.

The downtime in global business, risk of exposure to Covid-19, red tape, and the hurdles of overcoming travel restrictions overseas, all contribute to the current market situation.

Omotade Lepe, chief operating officer at the Association of Private Jets Nigeria, revealed that the sub-sector had lost between \$1 billion to \$5 billion due to the pandemic.

Speaking in Lagos at a recent launch of a mobile app from new luxury tech and travel company, Avantefly, Benedict Adeyileka, the former rector of the International Aviation College (IAC) in Ilorin, Kwara State, called for policies that could encourage private jet operators in the interest of Nigeria's economy.

He stressed the importance of encouraging investors to use their savings, or to borrow from banks, to purchase assets or aircraft for business, and to be confident that the country's policies would protect them.

Adeyileka emphasised the need for a deeper evaluation of the policies that could encourage the sub-sector's prosperity, spilling into contributions to the overall economy of the country.

"The only way we can stop these problems we have now is to have our own manpower development, to have our own internal development. I don't want a situation where there is lack of capacity and people from outside the country will come inside the country and take the market," he said.

Dikko Nwachukwu, chief executive of Jetwest Mobility, said there were opportunities for Nigeria that the Covid-19

pandemic experience had produced, stressing that tapping into these would give luxury operators the required boost.

He made a case for partnerships, saying it [Covid] had become a great catalyst in making the industry sit up.

"Looking inwards to see how we can grow our own industries here in Nigeria, we have a lot of resources across west Africa. We have a lot, and brothers in east and southern Africa have been doing this for a long time. The question is: 'How do we key into this?'"

David Augustine, chief pilot of Ezuma Jets, agreed, noting that there was huge potential for business if policies are put right, despite the Covid situation.

"We need the government to help us out with easier policies," he said, emphasising the importance of making the AOC acquisition process easier.

"I want us to understand that the private jet industry is an industry that can bring so much change into the Nigerian economy," he added, explaining that pulling resources together could help private jet operators in times like this.

To make the environment more progressive for this unique market, Olu Ohunayo of the Aviation Safety Round Table Initiative (ASTRTI) said the government should provide a safe environment for private jet operations.

However, he also noted that the government needed to tighten recording processes and ensure that organisations paid the requisite fees for the country's benefit.

In the spotlight: Private jets parked at Lagos airport.

PICTURE: LAMIDI BAMIDELE





Top attraction: The AG Aviation 2021 user conference demonstrated this new Air Tractor AT 502XP.
PICTURE: GARTH CALITZ.

Air Tractor ploughs an exciting new furrow

Capital investment in the latest agricultural aircraft has received a welcome boost in South Africa thanks to the agricultural sector enjoying boom years on the back of strong market prices, good rainfall, and strong product demand. Guy Leitch reports.

A key beneficiary of the wave of investment in new top-of-the range agricultural aircraft has been AG Aviation Africa, the agents for Air Tractor.

To further build its position in this specialised market, AG Aviation and Pratt & Whitney Canada organised a conference of Air Tractor operators.

AG Aviation Africa managing director, Matt Kritzinger, and Graham Wells, chief operating officer, welcomed delegates, who were treated to a sunset water bombing and spraying display by two newly delivered Air Tractor 502XPs.

Underlining the need for investment in agricultural aircraft as aerial applicators, Omri van Zyl, the CEO of Agri Enterprises, pointed out that Africa possesses roughly 67% of all the arable land in the world, yet contributes just 1% of global agricultural production. "Africa has great potential – but no one can eat potential," he said.

Thanks to new capital investment and skills development, South Africa is fulfilling much of its potential and has become the largest citrus supplier in the world. Van Zyl said that this proves that agriculture, with the right investment, is able to produce excellent returns.

Day 2 featured a very well attended workshop, hosted by Pratt & Whitney Canada (PWC), the makers of the ubiquitous PT-6A engines that power modern crop-sprayer aircraft. All Air Tractors are powered by the PT-6, ranging from the AT-402B, delivering 680shp to the AT-802A's 1295shp.

PWC's regional sales manager for sub-Saharan Africa, Kaval Shah, was joined by Roberto Galant, field service manager for east and southern Africa, and Herman Starting, the field service manager for southern and western Africa. Their insights and experience fuelled a vigorous dialogue with the field operators.

Lively discussion and many novel ideas were suggested by the users in the field on how PWC could enhance its products and services to the agricultural aviation sector.

Kritzinger and Wells then laid out their vision to standardise the operation of Air Tractors throughout Africa, whether it be for crop maximisation, vector control (as with the current locust problem in north Africa) or wildfire control.

Training and development is a key requirement for the growth of agricultural aviation. AG Aviation announced that it is establishing a world-class training academy in

Stellenbosch, which will further assist operators to standardise across their industry for maximum efficiency at an operational level.

A full Air Tractor procedural simulator was scheduled to be delivered to support training.

The impact of the move into the fourth industrial revolution was explored. Software developer, Edward Whitton, has taken on the challenge of creating a comprehensive mobile app, named AG4, to manage all aspects of Air Tractor operations. Whitton successfully created a similar application for the management of Toyota services in Saudi Arabia.

The app will pre-empt which parts and services will be needed in the future, based on the operator's specific conditions and operation frequency. It will have the ability to inform the factory what parts will be needed and when, greatly reducing downtime due to lack of parts availability.



AG4 will also create maintenance scheduling and assist in the management process of the entire Air Tractor fleet.

Scott Smith currently heads the aviation department of Lloyds of London, concentrating on South Africa, Africa, Mexico, eastern European and central Asian business. Smith highlighted the challenges the insurance brokers face to get underwriters to understand that AG aircraft should be treated uniquely, whether they are performing crop spraying, vector control, or fighting fires.

Dr Anthon Botha, a physicist, strategist and future thinker, reviewed the future of crop spraying and other aerial technologies supported by the Air Tractor platform.

"The digital world of the fourth industrial revolution will be brought to us by embracing data, building digital twins to create a ubiquitous companion for support, ensuring that cyber and physical aspects get held close together as humans and machines co-work in intelligent environments," said Botha.

"This digitalisation drive by AG Aviation Africa will further build the AG community, introducing their culture of market support and extend existing trust. The future has arrived and jointly everyone should enter it with an excitement that will shape all our tomorrows," he concluded. ▲



Keeping it casual: AG Aviation's Graham Wells and Matt Kritzinger.

PICTURE: GARTH CALITZ

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DEFENCE ▲

DÉFENSE

Success story: An estimated 200 Hongdu JL-8 aircraft have been exported to Africa. These two belong to the Sudanese Air Force.

PICTURE: EDUARD ONYSHCHENKO, GFDL, WIKIPEDIA.

Below, left: Zimbabwe's JL-8s equip No2 Squadron at Gweru-Thornhill.

PICTURE: DANIE VAN DER MERWE, GFDL, WIKIPEDIA.

Below, right: Russia remains a major supplier of aircraft and helicopters to African air arms. The Mi-17 has proved particularly popular.

PICTURE: US DOD.



SALES FORCES

BATTLE LINES DRAWN IN FIGHT FOR THE AFRICAN MARKET

Sub-Saharan Africa is rapidly becoming a battleground for the rival arms industries of China and Russia. Jon Lake analyses the situation.

At one time, Russia was effectively a monopoly supplier of weapons to many African nations, thanks to ideological ties, and the affordability of Soviet 'kit'.

The ideological ties broke with the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the monopoly was ended as China made strenuous efforts to export arms to African nations, many of which had received significant investment from Beijing under the so-called 'belt and road' initiative.

Now, the signs are that Russia is awakening to the Chinese threat and Moscow is starting to mount something of a fightback!

Africa has already become an important market for Chinese arms exports and those exports are growing rapidly. China has already sold weapons to 23 African countries, more than any other supplier.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) calculated that China had become the fifth

largest arms exporter in the world during the last decade (2010 to 2020) behind the United States, Russia, France, and Germany, moving up from ninth on the list during the 2005-2009 period. Africa accounted for 19% of Chinese arms exports.

Chinese weapons are more affordable than American, European, or Russian manufactured systems, and are generally sold with 'no strings attached'.

Without the restrictions imposed by America or European suppliers, they are made regardless of the human rights records of the recipient nations.

Thus far, China has mostly exported relatively low-value equipment, including small arms, armoured personnel carriers, unmanned air vehicles (UAVs), and trainer and attack aircraft, often in small numbers, and usually without the long-term training and support arrangements that often represent the most profitable component of big defence contracts.

**Continued
on Page 36** ►

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

Up to now, most Chinese arms exports in Africa have been relatively small, and they have generally failed to capture a large share of the market.

The low cost of some of its products has allowed China to dominate some niche market sectors, however, especially where western nations can't or won't supply particular categories of equipment, for example armed drones, or where they simply do not want to supply equipment, wary of proliferating advanced equipment into a conflict zone, in the same way that Sweden (for example) refuses to export offensive weapons systems to the Middle East.

The Chinese Hongdu JL-8 (also known as the CATIC or Karakorum K-8) jet trainer and light attack aircraft has enjoyed particular success in Africa, with an estimated 200 delivered to the air forces of Angola, Egypt, Ghana, Namibia, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In days gone by, African nations were often gifted (or sometimes purchased) ageing MiG-21s or MiG-23s, but these were often 'too much aircraft' for the air forces concerned, which were unable to operate and support them. The JL-8 is easier and more economical to operate, and gives a basic fast jet capability.

The Chengdu J-7 (a Chinese derivative of the MiG-21) has also proved popular with some African air forces, as a much more affordable alternative to western fighters.

About 200 have been delivered to Egypt, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

Otherwise, the Chinese aircraft exported to African air forces in the biggest numbers are the Harbin Y-12 utility transport and the Harbin Z-9 helicopter.

The Y-12 has been exported to the air forces of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia. It is also used by the Republic of the Congo's ministry of transport, and by the Seychelles Government.

The Z-9 is used by Cameroon, Djibouti, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia and Zambia.

Some believe that China's sole aim in exporting weapons to Africa is commercial, and that "profit, not grand strategy, appears to be the primary motivator of these weapon sales" as the Georgetown University Center for Security Studies put it in a recent report.

Others disagree, and insist that Chinese arms

sales are directly linked to foreign policy objectives, and form part of a wider Chinese strategy, reinforcing the 'belt and road' plan for a sinocentric international trade network.

To some extent, it reflects a more assertive China's eagerness to compete with and, indeed, out-compete superpower rivals. In the short term it seems to be aiming to supplant Russia as the primary weapons supplier to those African countries unable or unwilling to purchase expensive US or European systems.

China has already become the 'arms exporter of choice' for Mozambique, Namibia, the Seychelles, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, each of which obtains more than 90% of its weapons from the country.

But, so far, China has failed to make significant inroads into the more lucrative and 'advanced' north African market, unable to sell many more complex weapon systems like fighter aircraft, helicopters, and main battle tanks, or to establish long-term training and support agreements.

And, while the human rights record of Nigeria's armed forces nearly derailed the country's acquisition of 12 Embraer/Sierra Nevada Corporation A-29 Super Tucanos, and

has stopped a planned procurement of Bell AH-1 Cobras 'in its tracks', China has been unable to exploit the potential opportunity, except by supporting a Pakistani sale of just three Sino-Pakistani JF-17 fighters.

It is noteworthy that, when Nigeria needed to restore grounded F-7 fighters (built in and supplied by China) to service, and to upgrade them, it turned to Pakistan, rather than China, to provide the services required.

There is still a widespread market resistance to

many Chinese weapons systems. Previous generations of Chinese military aircraft have often proved disappointing in service, with limited airframe lives, very short times between overhaul, and inadequate avionics, while aftersales support has sometimes been poor.

The resulting 'cheap and cheerful' reputation will be hard to shift, and China's newer, higher-end systems remain largely unproven, (while some systems, like the J-20 stealth fighter, have not even been offered for export).

Many customers would prefer second-hand, but still highly capable, US or European-made systems, which have a proven support network, and which may sometimes offer useful political leverage with the supplier.

In the face of growing Chinese arms exports, Russia seems to have mounted a real fightback to avoid losing what has been a very lucrative market. At the Shield Africa event in Cote d'Ivoire it revealed that it had made \$1.7 billion of defence sales to Africa over the last three years.

Russia wrote off \$20 billion of debt owed by African countries to the former Soviet Union, and has actively sought allies in the continent as its more assertive foreign policy (in the Crimea, Libya and Syria, for example) has brought it into conflict with the US and Europe.

In October 2019, Russia held a Russo-African summit in Sochi to promote bilateral and multilateral ties, gathering together all 54 African states, including 43 African heads of state.

Russia is, like China, eager to get access to deep water ports and to use sea routes with particular 'choke points', to access and/or extract abundant minerals, as well as finding markets for its products, including arms.

Russia has provided considerable support to General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), based in Tobruk, in the protracted civil war, supplying MiG-29s and Su 24s as well as SA-22

surface-to-air missiles, and dispatching the Wagner Group (a shadowy, notionally independent private military company).

Wagner was also used to bolster the regime of Sudan's Omar-al-Bashir in 2018-19, and Russia deployed 400 Wagner Group troops to the Central African Republic during the presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2020, winning the gratitude of President Faustin-Archange Touadéra, who leads the resource-rich state with its vital uranium deposits. ▲



Widely used: Mali is among the African operators of the Harbin Z-9 – a licence-built Aerospatiale Dauphin.
PICTURE: US DOD, NAVY PETTY OFFICER 1ST CLASS JEREMY WOOD.

As Morocco places an emphasis on unmanned systems, Egypt's Air Force is also embracing new weapons capabilities. Angie Bee and Jon Lake report.

Morocco and Egypt build up their strength



Morocco is currently strengthening and modernising its air power capabilities and developing relationships with partner nations in response to growing tensions in Western Sahara and with Algeria.

A key feature has been the purchase of Turkish-made Bayraktar TB-2 armed medium-altitude long-endurance (MALE) tactical unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

A first batch of 13 TB2s (including four ground operation stations) was delivered to the Moroccan Armed Forces (FAR) on September 17 and, two months later, an order for a further six was made.

The initial contract, placed with Turkish supplier, Baykar, in April last year, was worth around \$70million.

Reports suggest that Morocco made its first use of a weaponised UAV during an attack on a Polisario convoy in the disputed Western Sahara territory – the self-proclaimed Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in April last year.

This marked a significant change in the use of UAVs by the Moroccan Air Force. It was reported by local news outlets that the chief of the Polisario gendarmerie, Addah Al-Bendir, had been killed in uncertain circumstances during the attack.

The acquisition of four MQ-9B SeaGuardian UAVs from General Atomics was confirmed in December 2020, prior to the attack. This order included a range of guided munitions, including the AGM-114 Hellfire missile.

Morocco has also set its sights on becoming a UAV manufacturer. A \$22 million deal has been signed with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) in the wake of the Abraham Accords, which re-established diplomatic relations between the two countries. The arrangements include the purchase of armed UAVs from Israel and may also include the manufacturing of the Harop loitering munition in Morocco.

■ Meanwhile, in Egypt, the emphasis is now very much on precision strike. The delivery of Dassault Rafales in July 2015 and the induction of the MiG-29M/M2 in 2017 brought new weapons capabilities, including modern beyond-visual-range (BVR) air-to-air missiles and a raft of new French and Russian air-to-surface weapons, including MBDA's Scalp cruise missile. This brought a step-change in both air defence and attack capability.

But it is not just Egypt's 24 new Rafales and 46 MiG-

29M/M2s that are delivering these capabilities. The country's surviving Dassault Mirage 2000s (of 20 originally delivered in 1986-88) have recently received Emirati Al Tariq glide bombs, and may still retain AS30 air-to-surface missiles (ASMs).

The Al Tariq has also been integrated on Egypt's Lockheed Martin F-16Cs – at least on the most recent Block 52 aircraft.

The Al Tariq is essentially a kit that can be integrated with any Mk 81, Mk 82, Mk 83 and Mk 84 bomb to turn it into a precision weapon. This means that there are some 24 possible Al Tariq configurations, using different seekers, warheads and



Top: The Turkish-made Bayraktar TB-2 armed MALE UAV.
PICTURE: BAYRAKTAR.

Above: The Al Tariq has been integrated on Egypt's most recent Block 52 Lockheed Martin F-16Cs.
PICTURE: EAF.

wing kit options. When fitted with the pop-out wing kit, Al Tariq is claimed to have a range of more than 120km.

Mirage 2000s were first seen carrying Al Tariq weapons during the Qader 2021 exercise in July, and Block 52 F-16Cs were seen equipped with wing-kitted Al Tariqs in a video marking air force day celebrations on October 14.

The F-16s have also been seen carrying AGM-84 Harpoon, and AGM-65A/B/E Maverick ASMs, plus a range of laser-guided and GPS-guided bombs.

A French upgrade, tested in Djibouti, could hold the key to the future for Egypt's surviving Mirage 2000s.

The Armée de l'Air et de l'Espace (French air and space force) recently completed test flights of two upgraded Mirage 2000Ds that had been given a mid-life upgrade and then deployed to the Base Aérienne 188.

The aircraft carried out a raft of test missions working with the Mirage 2000-5s of Escadron de Chasse 3/11 'Corsica' and the French army forward air controllers (FAC). Support equipment, mission planning and debriefing systems were also tested and assessed as part of the exercise.

During the 20 days of testing, the Experimental Military Aviation Centre (CEAM) team assessed the upgraded aircraft, while the General Directorate of Armament testing (DGA) evaluated the new CC422 cannon pod.

Some of the features of the upgrade could be applied to other operators' Mirage 2000s, dramatically improving their air-to-ground and close air support capabilities through the addition of new VHF radios, Link 16 datalink, and a ROVER video datalink system.

The new CC422 gun pod contains a DEFA 550 F3 30mm cannon, with a 250-round magazine, and is installed on the left chin pylon below the air intake. This provides a gun for the two-seat Mirage 2000 for the first time. ▲



Upgrade: The Mirage testing in Djibouti.
PICTURE: JOHAN PIPE/ARMÉE DE L'AIR ET DE L'ESPACE.

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DÉFENSE

Mali turns to Russia as French relations falter

The Malian Minister of Defence, Colonel Sadio Camara, was present to welcome the delivery of four Mi-171 'Hip' helicopters, weapons and ammunition from Russia, writes *Angie Bee*. The helicopters were reportedly acquired at a cost of CFA 36 billion (\$61 million) as part of a contract signed in December 2020.

They were officially handed over to the armed forces by transitional president, Assimi Goita, at a ceremony on November 26 at Air Base 101. By then, the aircraft were already in service, having received their baptism of fire on November 1 during an operation to release three Chinese hostages.

The delivery came as tensions with France, the former colonial power, were growing. French President Emmanuel Macron pledged to draw down

forces committed to Operation Barkhane. The once 5,100-strong French contingent of troops, deployed to counter Al Qaeda and Islamic State-linked insurgents in the Sahel region, has already been reduced, and French bases at Kidal and Tessalit have been handed over to Malian troops, with the base at Timbuktu due to follow as *African Aerospace* was going to press.

This prompted Mali's Prime Minister, Choguel Maiga, to accuse France of abandoning his country, even though some 3,000 French troops will remain, supported by French air power and by French allies.

France intervened in Mali in January 2013 to halt a campaign by Tuareg and jihadist forces that threatened to overrun the capital, Bamako, but is

determined not to get bogged down in an unending war.

Relations have grown strained between France and the military junta that seized power in Mali in August 2020, deposing President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. They worsened when the military removed interim president, Bah Ndaw, and cancelled elections planned for February after he sacked several military officers from cabinet positions.

France is concerned that a proposed deal with Russia's Wagner Group could further destabilise the country, while US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, has warned Mali not to accept Russia's mercenaries. "They are known for their destabilising activities and human rights abuses and will not bring peace to Mali," he said. ▲



Baptism of fire: The Mi-171 'Hip' helicopters were used during an operation to release three Chinese hostages.

PICTURE: US DOD.

INDIA FLIES IN TO ASSIST MAURITIUS

The Mauritius Coast Guard has increased its maritime surveillance capabilities following the delivery of a Dornier 228 patrol aircraft, writes *Alan Dron*.

The twin turboprop, manufactured in India by Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL), has been leased to the Mauritian authorities from the Indian Navy. It will serve with the coast guard's maritime air squadron.

The aircraft is being leased to Mauritius at no cost to enable the island nation to handle increased workloads in its surrounding seas. The coast guard already operates three Dornier 228s, plus a single Britten-Norman BN-2T Islander.

The latest aircraft is understood to have been leased as an interim measure, before the arrival this year of a new-build 228, which is being purchased by Mauritius as part of a \$100 million line of credit advanced by Delhi to allow the Mauritian Coast



Guard to bolster its strength through the purchase of Indian-made aircraft and patrol vessels.

The Indian Government is also preparing to loan a Dhruv light helicopter to boost further the coast guard's surveillance abilities.

India is attempting to strengthen its relations with Indian Ocean nations in the face of the rapid

expansion of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) into the region. Beijing has built, and controls, a \$1.5 billion deep-water port at Hambantota in Sri Lanka. The port is under a 99-year lease to China Merchants Port Holdings, and India is concerned that it could become a base for PLAN vessels. ▲

PICTURE: INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION MAURITIUS

Even though the Covid-19 pandemic has strongly affected the industry, it has also opened up immense opportunities for airports to rethink current models, enhance capacity building, and transform their businesses. **Anuradha Deenapanray Chappard** reports.

Licence to skill: Five-year plan to revolutionise airports

African airports are preparing to bounce back efficiently and sustainably in the wake of the pandemic, and Airports Council International (ACI) Africa will be supporting them all the way.

The council has set up a five-year action plan (2022 to 2026) to implement its newly launched African airports development programme (AADP).

This aims to assist airports in achieving aerodrome certification through expert missions, extended technical support, and capacity building.

The AADP is in line with ACI Africa's mission to democratise access to knowledge and expertise throughout the continent.

Describing its programme as "ambitious but realistic" ACI Africa will assist 25 African airports and train some 1,875 personnel in various disciplines including safety, security,

operations, and economic sustainability – important pillars of an airport's operations and vital in achieving aerodrome certification status.

The programme aims to proactively develop the capacity of African airport personnel and the leadership teams to meet and/or exceed the required standards. This will effectively contribute to building a resilient and reliable aviation industry on the African continent.

The programme will also build capacity, while ensuring fairness, social and gender equality.

In order to make the AADP accessible to the neediest of Africa's airports, ACI Africa will leave no stone unturned.

"We are fully committed to achieving the objectives set in the AADP to advance, improve and promote the cause of aviation safety and security on the African continent," explained Ali Tounsi, ACI Africa secretary-general.

He added that the AADP had now become the

leading and most recognised programme among African airports.

One of the essential prerequisites of the AADP rests on strengthening and promoting African competence and expertise to support the development of the air transport industry on the continent, while at the same time advocating for African airports to have fully accessible and affordable programmes and services, including assistance and support missions, and capacity building.

According to Tounsi, the AADP is the spearhead of ACI Africa. It is the new springboard for African airports to achieve excellence in operational matters, management, and assessment and capacity building, thanks to the sharing of experience and know-how.

One of the essential components of AADP is the consolidation and promotion of African skills and expertise – hence the establishment of affordable

programmes to support the development of all African airports.

New technologies, automation, contactless biometrics, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, digital commerce, and innovative solutions will play a key role for a lasting recovery and in boosting airport revenue. Airport platforms will stand out thanks to these growth vectors.

"ACI Africa continues to support African airports in a sustainable way, especially during this unprecedented and ongoing crisis, by offering them many programmes and services to bridge the gap in airport security and safety," said Tounsi.

The programme offers virtual (due to the pandemic) and face-to-face training to meet the needs of airports and their staff, as well as financial support through scholarships.

From November 2020 to November 2021, more than 300 African airports personnel have been trained under the AADP, either at a nominal course fee or free of charge (around 25%).

Virtual classes (due to travel restrictions) encompassed more than 40 courses delivered by highly qualified African trainers.

ACI Africa believes that, realistically, five airports can be assisted under the AADP with the certification process per year, totalling 25 African airports over five years.

Around 700 African airport personnel have been trained over the last three-and-a-half years (from 2018 to November 2021).

ACI Africa has signed agreements with key partners, as well as specialised training centres, to expand its training portfolio.

The upheavals experienced globally are forcing airports to rethink training throughout the process to instil an innovative, creative and evolving training culture in the airport sector, and ACI Africa is at the forefront of this revolution.

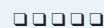
Le programme propose une formation virtuelle (en raison de la pandémie) et en présentiel répondant aux besoins des aéroports et de leur personnel, de même qu'un soutien financier à travers des bourses.

Grâce au programme AADP, plus de 300 employés ont bénéficié d'une quarantaine de cours de formation dispensés par des experts africains entre novembre 2020 et septembre 2021, soit à un coût nominal ou sans frais ou sous forme de bourse (plus de 25 % des participants).

Signalons que ACI Africa a signé des accords avec des partenaires clés de même que des centres de formation spécialisés pour étoffer et élargir son offre de formation.

tremplin permettant aux aéroports africains d'atteindre l'excellence en matière opérationnelle, de gestion, et d'évaluation et de renforcement des capacités grâce à un partage d'expérience et de savoir-faire », explique Ali Tounsi.

Selon lui, l'une des composantes essentielles du programme demeure la consolidation et la promotion des compétences et des expertises africaines pour soutenir le développement de l'industrie du transport aérien à travers le continent. D'où, la mise en place de programmes abordables et accessibles pour accompagner le développement de tous les aéroports africains.



SOMMAIRE

ACI AFRICA DÉMOCRATISE L'ACCÈS À LA FORMATION

Les aéroports africains se préparent à une relance post-COVID efficace et durable avec le soutien d'ACI Africa qui vient de lancer l'African Airports Development Programme (AADP).

« ACI Africa continue d'accompagner les aéroports africains de manière pérenne, surtout durant cette période de crise en leur proposant de nombreux programmes et des services pour combler le fossé au niveau de la sécurité et de la sûreté aéroportuaire », affirme Ali Tounsi, secrétaire général d'ACI Africa.

Le conseil a ainsi pris les devants pour que les aéroports africains soient dotés des ressources humaines qualifiées et adaptées aux besoins futurs des plateformes aéroportuaires notamment pour répondre aux enjeux de la transformation digitale et de la transition environnementale.

« L'African Airports Development Programme (AADP), le fer de lance d'ACI Africa, est le nouveau

NAS TAKES CARE WITH RAPID COVID SERVICE

National Aviation Services (NAS) has signed a partnership agreement with global healthcare company, Abbott, to drive the implementation of Covid-19 rapid testing solutions at major airports and trans-border lounges across Africa and the Middle East. **Anuradha Deenapanray Chappard** reports.

The leading airport services provider is using its global network, local relationships, and industry expertise, to work with local authorities to deploy Abbott's Panbio Covid-19 ag rapid test device and the ID NOW molecular point-of-care test system.

Both these solutions offer quick testing for Covid-19, thus encouraging and facilitating safer cross-border travel and supporting the global aviation industry to recover safely and sustainably.

These solutions can help fuel economies as more people resume international business, commerce and travel.

Abbott's Panbio Covid-19 ag rapid test device is a highly reliable, portable, and affordable rapid antigen test, which has received the European health, safety, and environmental protection standard CE Mark, and the World Health Organization (WHO) use listing procedure (EUL) go-ahead.

It has been deployed in dozens of countries across the world and delivers results in 15-20 minutes with no instrumentation, providing a scalable and cost-effective solution for governments and private industry.

"Our collaboration in purchasing and deploying the Abbot systems is aimed at continuing efforts to help restore passenger confidence to aid further recovery of international travel," explained NAS Group CEO, Hassan El-Houry (pictured right).

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, NAS, which is present in more than 50 airports, collectively managing in excess of 100 airlines and 50 airport lounges in Africa, the Middle East, and south Asia, has been driving efforts to implement digital solutions to help restart travel globally by collecting and verifying health data and ensuring authenticity of PCR test certificates of travellers.

NAS also introduced the medical utility network accreditator (MUNA), a patented blockchain technology that connects PCR testing labs in different countries and cities to verify and authenticate certificates for cross-border travel.

El-Houry said that the MUNA data in Kuwait, for example, was showing promising results. "We discovered that the number of positive cases entering the country were three times higher before MUNA was introduced. This suggests a significant reduction in infected cases entering the country with forged certificates or fake results."



PICTURE: NAS



▼ We are fully committed to achieving the objectives set in the AADP to advance, improve and promote the cause of aviation safety and security on the African continent. ▲

ALI TOUNSI

PICTURE: ACI AFRICA



Capacity-building: Terminal 2 in Lusaka was developed at a cost of \$360 million. PICTURES: ZACL

ZAMBIA'S ZEST

Maggie Kaunda, acting managing director at the Zambia Airports Corporation, talks to **Keith Mwanalushi** about the opening of new airport infrastructure in the capital, Lusaka, and Ndola in the Copperbelt.

Zambia's largest airport infrastructure projects – the new Terminal 2 at Kenneth Kaunda International (KKIA) in Lusaka and a greenfield airport in Ndola – have finally opened.

"This is in response to the government's intention to make Zambia into a regional transport hub for passenger and cargo movements," explained Maggie Kaunda, acting MD at Zambia Airports Corporation Limited (ZACL).

Investment of more than \$1 billion has been injected by the state.

"The infrastructure development projects are also a response to ZACL's land use plans, which seek to develop the concept of an 'airport city' around our four international airports, transforming them into real economic destinations," said Kaunda.

Terminal 2 in Lusaka was developed at a cost of \$360 million and includes a new terminal building with six aero bridges, a new air traffic control (ATC) centre, a cargo terminal, a hotel, plus VIP and fire-and-rescue facilities.

The new terminal caters for four million passengers annually and the old terminal building, which has seen little upgrading since it opened in 1967, will now be refurbished and rebranded as Terminal 1, boosting total capacity to six million.

In addition, airport services provider, National Aviation Services (NAS), and local ground services company, NAC2000, revealed a five-year tender for a 588sqm exclusive departure lounge that will cater to all passengers travelling out of the airport in Lusaka.

The new Pearl Lounge is part of more than 50 lounges operated by NAS across its network in Africa, the Middle East and south Asia.

Lusaka's KKIA is the largest facility in the country and is located within a two-hour catchment area of other southern African capitals, which should make it an ideal transit airport for connecting traffic.



Regular direct connections by Emirates to Dubai and Qatar Airways to Doha, and the start of domestic and planned regional services by Zambia Airways, should add to the appeal of Lusaka becoming an ideal transit centre.

Local operator, Proflight Zambia, already serves popular domestic points and Johannesburg; but both local carriers will need to significantly bolster their networks and capacities to tap into the transit market.

Clearly, the latest Covid variant, Omicron, put spanners in the works when much of southern Africa was placed on the no-go list by several countries around the world. In 2019, before the pandemic hit the region, it was estimated that Zambia's passenger traffic was growing by a steady rate of 5% per annum. The effects of the pandemic caused a decrease of about 80% in 2020 compared to 2019, according to ZACL.

The pandemic caused significant delays to the airport projects, which saw completion timelines moved for both facilities in Lusaka and Ndola. "Project targets had to be revised and there were delays in the delivery of construction materials. This meant that operationalisation of Terminal 2 and Simon Mwansa Kapwepwe International Airport in Ndola was delayed by more than 12 months," said Kaunda.

The new airport in Ndola serves as a gateway to the mineral-rich Copperbelt region, which is the backbone of the country's copper mining activities and essentially pulls much of the mining business and cargo flow.

The \$397 million greenfield project consists of both passenger and cargo terminals. There is capacity for one million passengers annually and the 2,996sqm cargo terminal can cater for 8,000 tonnes of freight per annum.

The terminal building has a heavyweight ventilation and air conditioning system, integrated baggage handling, an integrated fire suppression system, three aero bridges, stand-by power generators, and self-checking counters.

"As a corporation, we are engaging new airlines to increase traffic levels," said Kaunda. "Qatar Airways, for example, commenced operations to Lusaka in August 2021, which was a welcome addition. And, with the arrival of Zambia Airways, we expect growth in traffic levels and reduced rates, bringing healthy competition to the domestic airline market."

Maggie Kaunda: "ZACL's land use plans seek to develop the concept of an 'airport city' around our four international airports, transforming them into real economic destinations."

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Dnata, one of the world’s largest air services providers, offering ground-handling, cargo, travel, and flight catering services, is making its first venture into Africa. **Jill Stockbridge** reports.

Zanzibar deal marks African milestone for Dnata

UAE-based Dnata has signed a concession agreement with the Government of Zanzibar to oversee the operations of Zanzibar Abeid Amani Karume International Airport’s (ZNZ’s) new international terminal.

The company will provide a range of ground and passenger-handling, cargo, and airport hospitality services at ZNZ when the new terminal opens early this year.

Dnata expects to handle more than 4,000 flights per annum at the airport.

The agreement includes a partnership with Emirates Group companies, Emirates Leisure Retail and Maritime and Mercantile International (MMI), as master concessionaire for all food and beverage, duty free and commercial outlets at the new terminal.

The Dnata team will be working in cooperation with SEGAP, a joint venture between airport infrastructure and operations specialists, Egis, and private equity fund manager, AIIM, which will support the Zanzibar Airports Authority in a management capacity.

□□□□□

SEGAP has a history of investment in and management of airport operation companies in Africa. It aims to develop African airports by providing expertise in key areas of airport operations, aviation and ancillary services, while ensuring safety and quality of service, to make air travel in Africa more efficient, accessible and affordable.

Dnata’s expansion into Tanzania will see it make a \$7 million investment in infrastructure, equipment, technology and people, creating up to 400 direct local jobs with the company, and bringing the cutting-edge technologies to the Indian Ocean archipelago that the company is

implementing across the world on five continents.

Dnata will invest in a state-of-the-art cargo centre to establish freight operations at the airport, supporting local trade and businesses. The facility will comply with the highest industry standards, ensuring efficient and safe handling of a broad range of cargo, including perishables, pharmaceuticals, dangerous goods, live animals, aircraft engines and vehicles.

In addition, the company will launch meet-and-greet and lounge services through its airport hospitality brand, Marhaba, to enhance the passenger experience so people can enjoy a smooth airport journey from check-in to boarding.

□□□□□

HE Dr Hussein Ali Mwinyi, President of Zanzibar and chairman of the Revolutionary Council, said: “The launch of our new terminal at the Abeid Aman Karume International Airport marks a turning point in our efforts in becoming a globally recognised island for tourism and trade.

“The Zanzibar Airport Authority’s partnership with Dnata reaffirms our commitment to international excellence in providing a seamless experience for all international visitors.

“We look forward to expanding our global footprint in facilitating trade and investment via our increased handling capacity for both passenger and air cargo operations.”

Steve Allen, executive vice president of Dnata and chairman of Emirates Leisure Retail and MMI, said: “We are thrilled to expand our global footprint into Africa and establish operations at the airport of Zanzibar. We are confident that our investment in the local aviation industry will stimulate tourism and trade, delivering significant benefits for Zanzibar businesses and the local community.

“Our team’s passion for excellence, broad partnership network and global experience in providing best-in-class ground-handling, airport hospitality, and food and beverage services, will ensure consistent quality at every stage of the airport journey.

“We will deliver an innovative and fresh airport concept that provides an integrated passenger experience, while showcasing Zanzibar’s traditions and style.

“We look forward to a fruitful partnership with the Zanzibar Airports Authority and SEGAP.” ▲

Turning point: The new terminal at the Abeid Aman Karume International Airport marks a milestone in Zanzibar’s ambition of becoming a globally recognised island for tourism and trade.

PICTURE: DNATA.



Un Cessna Grand Caravan d’Aviation Sans Frontières. PICTURE: AVIATION SANS FRONTIÈRES

TRANSFORMATION TITANESQUE UN ATELIER MRO EN RÉPUBLIQUE CENTRAFRICAINE

C’est un travail titanesque étalé sur six ans que Jean-Claude Cuisine-Etienne et les équipes d’Aviation Sans Frontières ont réalisé pour mettre en œuvre leur projet d’atelier MRO à Bangui.

Aviation Sans Frontières avait un atelier de maintenance à Kinshasa, un de ses avions était basé à Bangui et un autre à Goma. Cette situation devenait problématique car il fallait faire des allers-retours aux frais de l’ONG pour la maintenance de ses avions sachant qu’une « shop visit » était planifiée chaque 100 heures de vol avant de passer à 200 heures. Aviation Sans Frontières effectue également ses activités MRO chez Air Serve à l’aéroport d’Entebbe.

L’idée est venue ensuite d’installer un atelier MRO à Bangui. De fil en aiguille, le projet a pris forme avec le soutien des autorités centrafricaines. L’atelier se situera dans le hangar central de la zone aéroclub au sud de l’aérogare de l’aéroport international de Bangui.

Aviation Sans Frontières a réhabilité un hangar de l’aéroport international de Bangui-M’poko en centre de maintenance aéronautique.

Vincent Chappard a parlé à Jean-Claude Cuisine-Etienne, responsable des opérations aériennes de l’ONG.

SUMMARY

CREATING AN MRO AT BANGUI-M’POKO AIRPORT

Aviation Sans Frontières is utilising a redundant hangar at the Central African Republic’s Bangui-M’poko International Airport to create a local MRO facility for its aircraft, writes *Vincent Chappard*.

The six-year project has been a “titanic effort”, according to the NGO’s Jean-Claude Cuisine-Etienne.

Aviation Sans Frontières already operates a maintenance workshop in Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo), although as one of its aircraft was based in Bangui and the other in Goma, this became both expensive and time-consuming for the cash-strapped NGO whenever maintenance was required.

The organisation also uses the MRO facilities of Air Serve at Entebbe Airport in Uganda.

The NGO concluded that an MRO workshop in Bangui would be both convenient and cost-effective and so – with

government support – the workshop is located in the central hangar of the flying club area, south of the terminal.

Cuisine-Etienne said: “Over many months, we presented the project to the Central African Republic’s authorities and work began in January 2021. It’s hoped that everything will be finished, ready for opening, early this year.”

The NGO uses three aircraft types – Cessna Caravan, LET410 and a Beechcraft 1900 – and the plan is for graduate mechanics from the Amaury de la Grange Institute to be fully qualified after three years.

The MRO workshop will also be Part-145 certified, as ASF operates as an airline with air operator certification.

Aviation Sans Frontières works contractually under the aegis of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) in the Central African Republic and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. ▲

« Nous avons présenté le projet aux autorités centrafricaines et avons obtenu l’autorisation de l’ASECNA de Bangui pour réhabiliter le hangar central de la zone aéroclub. Les travaux ont démarré début janvier 2021. La réhabilitation est en cours de finition et la mise en service est prévue pour début 2022 », explique Jean-Claude Cuisine-Etienne.

Grâce à cette infrastructure, Aviation Sans Frontières pourra effectuer la maintenance de sa flotte dans un même lieu et optimiser ainsi les dépenses liées à ses missions. C’est un élément clé dans son développement, cela permettra de déployer plus de ressources pour ses missions en Afrique.

Aviation Sans Frontières lance également un appel à l’aide pour financer et installer des panneaux solaires sur le toit du hangar.

□□□□□

« Un atout important de ce centre MRO est de pouvoir accueillir la maintenance des trois types d’avions utilisés par les Nations unies : le Cessna Caravan, le Led410 et le Beechcraft 1900 », précise Jean-Claude Cuisine-Etienne. « Nous comptons recruter en tant que bénévoles des mécaniciens déjà diplômés de L’Institut Amaury de la Grange qui pourront à l’issue de 3 ans dans notre atelier Part 145 (agrément EASA), posséder leur licence de mécanicien Part 66. Nous souhaitons également proposer ces prestations à la zone CEMAC (Communauté économique et monétaire de l’Afrique centrale). »

Le projet a ainsi été pensé dans cet esprit de partager des compétences et de faciliter les opérations de logistique humanitaires dans la région. L’atelier MRO sera également certifié Part-145, Aviation Sans Frontières opérant avec un certificat de transporteur aérien comme une compagnie aérienne.

Les besoins aériens pour les opérations humanitaires restent importants dans la région. Aviation Sans Frontières travaille contractuellement sous l’égide du United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) en Centrafrique et en République démocratique du Congo (Bunia). L’ONG espère renouveler son contrat de deux ans en 2022. D’autres coopérations sont également évoquées avec l’organisation médicale humanitaire ALIMA. ▲

E-delivery ‘first’ leads to a new lease of life

An up-and-coming international aircraft asset management company with roots in Morocco is making a name for itself with innovation and a can-do attitude. **Chuck Grieve** talks to chief executive, **Ali Ben Lmadani**.

How do you deliver an aircraft during a global pandemic lockdown? Electronically, of course – right up to the factory-to-base ferry flight.

E-delivery is what ABL Aviation calls the process that it pioneered with an Airbus A321neo placed with Pegasus Airlines, the Turkish low-cost carrier, just as the pandemic restrictions started to bite in April 2020.

Ali Ben Lmadani, chief executive of ABL Aviation, credits the pandemic response with accelerating the inevitable. “Covid pushed us to do this,” he said. “In this regard, it was very helpful.”

Moroccan-born Ben Lmadani founded his full-service aircraft investment and independent asset management company in 2014. It now has bases in Casablanca, Dubai, Dublin, Hong Kong and New York.

With more than \$2 billion in total capital allocations and 42 aircraft managed, it counts Lufthansa, Delta, Iberia, and Pegasus among its growing list of clients.

In April 2020, when ABL completed the world’s first e-delivery, “nobody was doing it”, although others were also grappling with the challenge. ABL “needed to find a solution”; it was simply a matter of honouring business commitments.

“We discussed with Pegasus the idea of doing this as an e-delivery,” Ben Lmadani said. This meant as much as possible of the normal three phases of delivery – technical acceptance, transfer of title, and ferry flight – had to be completed remotely.

“The technical was done by Airbus directly. Instead of having all the people moving to Toulouse for delivery, with lawyers etc, all the signatures were done remotely.

“Of course, we needed the pilots to deliver the aircraft to the airline, and that was it.”

Since then, ABL has completed several more e-deliveries, including an A320neo for Pegasus, and watched as competitors and banks followed suit.



Ali Ben Lmadani: “Owning the value on assets shouldn’t be the business of the airline.”
PICTURE: ABL AVIATION

Innovations seem to be ABL Aviation’s hallmark, and the company is gaining industry recognition for them.

It arranged the first aircraft purchase funded by a Japanese operating lease with call option (JOLCO) combined with Aircraft Finance Insurance Consortium (AFIC) supported debt, enabling a Middle East client to purchase a new Boeing 787-9 aircraft.

It also secured JOLCO financing for the A321 e-delivered to Pegasus.

ABL was the first aircraft asset manager to set up offices in Africa – in 2017 in Casablanca – a milestone for Ben Lmadani as a “proud Moroccan”. It appears to have been a good

tactical decision, and adds an interesting dimension to ABL’s network of offices.

Morocco is a “very strong” aviation market, he said. His company is looking at more projects in-country, such as aircraft end-of-life work “like part-out or dismantling, which have lots of added value”. He cites the example of countries, including Spain and France, where comparable industries are established. Morocco, he suggests, “can do better” with its lower cost and “very smart” labour force.

“I’m always trying to see how we can make Moroccan aviation grow,” he added.

From his perspective as a frequent international traveller, Ben Lmadani has reason to be optimistic about the future of aviation and his company’s role in it. The recovery of domestic markets in the US, China, and elsewhere is “amazing”, given the dramatic impact of Covid-19 on the industry.

Among significant ramifications of the pandemic downturn was the widespread renegotiation of lease terms by airlines, and the boost overall to leasing. Operators, he said, are “more and more inclined to lease”.

Covid-19 gave a significant push to leasing and reinforced the perception of aircraft leasing as a separate business to running an airline.

“Owning the value on assets shouldn’t be the business of the airline; that should be the business of leasing companies. So, [the risk of] having the future value of an asset on your balance sheet [when] you don’t know if you’re going to need it five years from now should be taken by someone else.”

ABL Aviation’s global insights report of September 2021 noted that lessors now own nearly half of all aircraft on the market, and lease rates per seat are now lower, in actual dollar terms, than they were 30 years ago; in real terms, they’re probably half of what they were when leasing was in its infancy.

In the Middle East, leased aircraft have long been present in the fleets of operators such as Emirates, Flydubai and Qatar Airways. Ben Lmadani said: “They were new companies and they were smart about it. I think they leased more than some of the old-time legacy carriers at that time.

“If I were CEO of an airline, my job would be to market seats. My job would be to make sure that my profit and loss is all right. My job would be to negotiate with lessors to make sure that I have a good lease. My job would not be to have a bunch of metal on my balance sheet that I’m stuck with if I change my business model.

“This is the way the world is going; this is

where the smart airlines in the Middle East – and you have lots of them – are going. They are leasing, similar to some of the airlines in the US, which I think is the future.”

The economics of aviation are impossible to ignore, he added. “Without aviation, there is no business.” As well as facilitating trade and investment, the support industries surrounding aviation make a huge contribution to a country’s economy.

“If you look at the Emirates, you have this whole ecosystem that is built on aviation. I think it was very smart, developing as it’s needed. We saw that in Jordan, with a lot of investment being done in aviation, and in Morocco [which is] pushing very hard to become the hub of African innovation.”

In the aftermath of Covid and with a growing urgency for sustainable operations, fleet renewal is high on the agenda; airlines “are getting rid of the old fleet now and leasing the new fleet because they see that there’s good opportunities. There will always be a need for aircraft.” ▲

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▲ ALL IN A DAY

Sameer Rehman

Marcelle Nethersole

*speaks to the Bell
managing director for
Africa and the Middle East.*

Bell has a strong presence across Africa. Can you give examples?

As the world's oldest manufacturer of helicopters, Bell has been present in Africa and the Middle East for a long time; its aircraft can be found in 40 African countries.

Of its 1,000 aircraft in the joint region, South Africa has the highest concentration.

Bell aircraft are built for their agility and versatility – they are designed to carry out an array of missions in extreme conditions, with impressive cargo-carrying capacities, long range, and low pilot workload.

From the Bell 206s to the 505s, along with the larger Bell 407 and 429, each aircraft offers supreme reliability and adaptability.

What particular helicopter models are popular in Africa?

The Bell 407 is particularly popular as it can perform such a broad range of missions; public safety, utility, and helicopter emergency medical services (HEMS), along with corporate, armed multi-role, and training.

The Bell 407GX earned Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) instrument flight rules (IFR) certification in 2019, which allows all-weather operations. Additionally, the 407 global fleet has surpassed more than six million flight hours.

The Bell 505 has also had success in the region with its four passenger and one pilot capacity. Its intuitive flight control experience is useful for new pilots.

The Bell 412 can be utilised for a variety of mission sets, such as transportation to offshore oil rigs, or transfer of troops

Unmanned aerial vehicles are now being increasingly used – traditionally for geological mapping missions, they can also carry significant payloads. Bell's Autonomous Pod Transport is capable of autonomous flight, as well as vertical take offs and landings, and can carry a payload of 50kg.

What are the main challenges faced in Africa?

Mobility concerns will continue to challenge current infrastructure everywhere. However, we have a robust commercial and military product line that is capable of meeting the needs of our global customers.

Our aircraft are designed to require simple, easy-to-maintain components with a long lifespan.

Bell has great long-standing relationships with reputable independent representatives throughout the African continent.

We continue to innovate and, by working as a provider of technology, we consider the bigger picture, which comprises infrastructure, training, servicing and sustainment of our aircraft. By continually looking at ways to improve all of these areas, we can mitigate potential challenges.



PICTURE: BELL

How does Bell compete with other manufacturers in Africa?

The rebranding of the company changed Bell from a helicopter manufacturer to a vertical lift experience company.

We are a technology company that's about mobility and sustainability – the ability to get people and goods from one point to another as quickly and efficiently as possible.

One thing that differentiates us from our competitors is the versatility of our aircraft and the mission range – whether it's para-public and law enforcement, or corporate travel and HEMS, Bell aircraft can do it all.

Perhaps, most importantly, Bell is known for its superior customer service.

The award-winning Bell network is represented all over the world.

Everything is carefully curated and planned – from the clean-sheet design to the availability of parts, expertise and support throughout a product's long lifespan.

We take great pride in being safe, efficient and available.

What is next for Bell in Africa?

We are constantly innovating – Bell was the first to break the sound barrier; part of the first lunar mission; the company gave the world its first certified commercial helicopter; now we have the tilt rotor and we keep going.

Our work is pivotal in future vertical lift.

Next, we are looking at unmanned and autonomous flight. Our Autonomous Pod Transport is breaking new barriers and we will continue to bring new technology to the market.

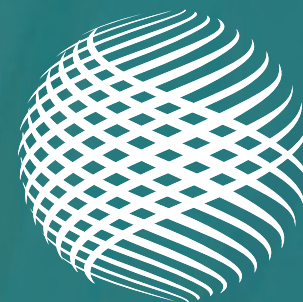
On sustainability – including sustainable aviation fuels, hybrid technology, and electric vehicles – Bell will look to lead the way across the entire eco-system in future mobility and vertical lift.

What does a typical day involve for you?

My day can vary a lot, depending upon where I am in the region. I drive an integrated sales team to promote Bell's aircraft and support to the region.

I may travel to meet a potential client or an existing one, whether that is a government delegation in the GCC or one of the more remote African countries.

I attend a variety of industry events, so I stay in tune with what is happening in the market.



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The Global Aerospace Summit, hosted by Mubadala, will return as a leadership gathering of the aerospace, defence, aviation and space industries in 2022.

The Summit is a gathering place for thought-leaders, technology innovators and adjacent industry experts who discuss where investments must be made now to drive renewal in the aerospace sectors and how to capitalise on the opportunities that arise from the fundamentally reshaped business ecosystem.

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THE WORLD IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE

Keeping it that way is at the centre of all we do. That's why, with our unwavering commitment to decarbonisation, Airbus is paving the way for sustainable aerospace. Today, our technological developments are already helping to safeguard our precious planet. Discover more about how we're leading the journey, shaping a brighter future for generations to come.

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