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**HOW NAS KEPT ITS
NERVE IN THE PANDEMIC**

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Fighting back from the pandemic

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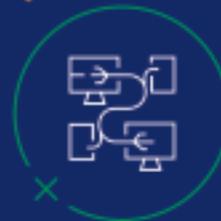
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COVER:
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Kuwait-based National
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wants to resume the privately
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group's growth story.
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African Aerospace magazine is published in partnership with AFRAA



African Aerospace magazine is published with the support of AFBAA



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Africa must not be left behind

As the world plans for recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and the aviation industry leadership, in the shape of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Air Transport Association (IATA), plan route-maps to utilise vaccination as a driver for kick-starting international business and tourism, Africa finds itself in a perilous state.

At the first of a series of webinars from the African Airlines Association (AFRAA), secretary general, Abderahmane Berthe, warned that only 20% of the continent's population would be vaccinated by the end of 2021, well below global targets to have 60% inoculated and achieving herd immunity.

It could be two or three years before Africa reaches that level. As such, it could be that long before African carriers return to 2019 passenger figures, he said.

Many international carriers stopped flights to Africa during the pandemic and some will be slow to resume.

Africa is still adversely affected by high fuel prices, fragmented air traffic markets, and a lack of infrastructure – the latter, in particular, is one reason why the vaccinations will take so long to deliver.

If Covid has taught us one thing, it is that air-connectivity, with freight and people, is essential.

Africa has the opportunity to see governments think outside the box and stimulate the revival by reducing cash-cow taxation on fuel and airport charges and encouraging airlines to serve Africa; drop protectionism and implement initiatives such as the single African air transport market (SAATM) quickly.

□□□□□

I am encouraged by the changing attitude of the government of Nigeria. That is reflected by a growth in the number of airlines jockeying to serve this sleeping aviation giant of a country. As you will see in this issue, there is a belief that now is the time for Nigeria to get its act together and truly live up to its potential.

The lesson of what can happen with state intervention and bleeding a carrier dry is clear to all, with the current situation at South African Airways.

Private operations can work. Africa can develop world-class businesses. South Africa's Paramount Group and Kuwait's NAS are cited in this issue. They believe in the future of Africa and the strength of its people – if only governments would do the same.

Alan Peaford, editor-in-chief



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Alexandra Guillot, CEO of Hi-Fly Marketing.



Malawi STEM project set for lift-off

A new science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programme is about to be rolled out across Malawi, thanks to a partnership including the African section of the Ninety Nines International Organisation of Women Pilots.

The Ninety Nines have teamed up with The Little Engineer, a scientific educational initiative geared towards educating students of all ages, and the Airbus Foundation, to launch the Airbus Little Engineer (ALE) interactive digital programme in Malawi.

The project was originally rolled out in Botswana in February 2019 with great success. Its aim is to inspire 10 to 16-year-olds through a series of interactive online 3D modelling workshops.

The goal is to encourage students to understand and embrace technology and ignite a passion that could grow into an exciting STEM career.

Great success:
The project was originally rolled out in Botswana.

PICTURE: AIRBUS

Air Namibia shutdown

Air Namibia announced on Twitter that all flight operations were suspended from February 11 because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

The airline informed its 636 employees that each will receive a 12-month severance package, but benefits would end immediately.

Costs summit agrees action plan

More than 250 participants took part when the African Aviation Industry Group (AAIG) held a top-level webinar to discuss practical solutions for reducing the high cost of air transport operations in Africa.

Stakeholders agreed on a set of actions to achieve the goal of a sustainable African aviation industry.

Participants further identified key challenges affecting the sustainability of African aviation, such as safety and security concerns, poor intra-Africa connectivity, market access limitations, and inadequate infrastructure, among others.

Those attending represented aviation institutions, development

agencies, airlines, civil aviation authorities, airport operators, airline associations, government entities, aircraft manufacturers and aviation solutions and service providers.

JKIA boost

Spanish information technology and defence systems company, Indra, will revamp the air traffic control system at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA).

This control centre will facilitate the coordination of flights approaching JKIA and two other airports in Nairobi – Eastleigh and Wilson.

The Indra system, which will synchronise everything, includes the automation of

the control centre, control towers, and a simulator for training the controllers.

It will also incorporate the existing sensor network, providing a highly accurate view of the air traffic.

Buying up space

Kenya Airways has unveiled economy max, a product that allows customers to create additional personal space by booking a seat or a row next to them.

Economy Max, a first of its kind for an African carrier, will be available for purchase up to three hours before departure to all KQ economy-class customers.

The airline said economy max will meet the evolving needs of travellers during the pandemic.

Sustainable commitment

Boeing is committing that its commercial aircraft will be capable and certified to fly on 100% sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) by 2030. The company has conducted successful test flights, replacing petroleum jet fuel with 100% sustainable fuels to address the urgent challenge of climate change.

Sustainable aviation fuels reduce CO2 emissions by up to 80% over the fuel's life cycle, with the potential to reach 100% in the future.

Passing phase

RwandAir will become the first African airline to trial the International Air Transport Association

(IATA) travel pass, to enable safe and seamless international travel. The airline was due to begin a three-week trial this month for customers travelling between Kigali and Nairobi in Kenya.

Stamp of approval

Ethiopia is the latest destination to be awarded the World Travel & Tourism Council (W TTC) safe travel stamp – its first-ever global safety and hygiene certification. This comes following major steps implemented by the ministry of culture and tourism last year to ensure safety for residents, travellers, workers and tourism businesses, as Ethiopia reopened its borders to international visitors.

IATA VP faces up to the pandemic's challenges

Kamil Al-Awadhi, the new International Air Transport Association (IATA) regional vice president for Africa and the Middle East, took up his position in March.

"This is the most challenging time for air transport – in AME and around the world," said the former Kuwait Airways CEO.

"The top priority is reconnecting the world when governments are able to safely re-open borders without travel restrictions.

"And the immediate action is supporting governments in establishing benchmarks and plans for an orderly resumption of service.

"The crisis has also reinforced our determination to tackle some major issues – reducing emissions, modernising processes, and reforming air traffic management."



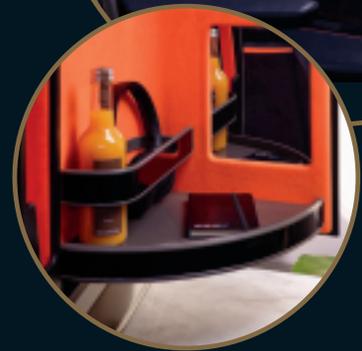
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MAX double boost

The Civil Aviation Authorities of both Kenya and Nigeria have announced the lifting of the ban on Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, following two deadly crashes in Ethiopia and Indonesia.

NCAA director general, Captain Musa Nuhu, said the aircraft model had been granted approval to operate in Nigeria's airspace following the recertification and airworthiness directive issued by the United States Federal Aviation Administration.

Eagle landings

Nigeria's NG Eagle has received its first two Boeing 737-700s. The former Arik Air aircraft were delivered to Lagos Airport from Addis Ababa.

NG Eagle was set up in July 2019 with the Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria being the majority shareholder. The airline is currently seeking to obtain its air operator's certificate (AOC).
■ Nigeria focus, page 19.

Dragonfly fired up

Satellite-based communication solutions company, Addvalue Innovation, has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with South Africa's Dragonfly



Freight expectations: From left, Hubert Wigwe, Access Bank group managing director; Hadi Sirika, Minister of Aviation; and Godwin Emezie, governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, receive the aircraft.

PICTURE: ALLIED AIR.

Converted 737 for vaccine deliveries

West Africa's biggest cargo airline, Allied Air, has taken delivery of its first Boeing 737-800 converted freighter.

The aircraft is the first for airlines in Africa and the freighter is the youngest 737-800 in the world that has been converted to date.

The technologically advanced cargo

aircraft will be deployed to Covid-19 vaccine distribution across Nigeria as one of its first missions, as it is fitted to deliver medical supplies safely.

The deal was financed through the Central Bank of Nigeria's intervention fund, but structured and delivered by the Access Bank.

Aerospace, a space engineering and missions company, for a joint marketing collaboration in cross-promoting Dragonfly's imaging payloads and satellites.

Dragonfly started its business with Earth observation satellite missions in the 1980s before progressing to satellite launch in 2018 and, subsequently, to imager launch in 2020.

It aims to use its collaboration with

Singapore-based Addvalue to tackle two high-priority Earth observation challenges – the quality of the images and the latency of imaging between LEO satellites and satellite operators.

Paramount winner

South Africa-based Paramount Group has been recognised as one of the Top Employers Institute's 2021 award-winners.

This is the second consecutive year the

aerospace and technology company's commitment to excellence in 'people practices' had been recognised.

Alison Crooks, CEO of Paramount Industrial Holdings, said: "I've never ceased to be amazed by the determination of this company and our employees, who comprise its 'people power', making a lasting mark on our industry, while creating a positive work environment in the process."

Geven wins Ugandan seat deal for A330-800neo

Uganda Airlines has selected Geven's Piuma AQ and Comoda AQ premium economy-class sustainable seats for its A330-800neo aircraft. Alberto Veneruso, managing director of Geven, said: "Working together with Uganda's team for the first time was a huge inspiration for us."

Uganda Airlines CEO, Cornwell Muleya, added: "We are excited about the delivery of the A330-800neo, which strengthens our fleet capabilities and introduces the desired comfort standards for our long-haul operations."

"We are proud of our beautifully equipped aircraft, which features a three-class layout, including a fully lie-flat business class seat."

Rolls-Royce also signed a TotalCare agreement with Uganda Airlines for its new Airbus A330neo aircraft powered exclusively by Rolls-Royce Trent 7000 engines.



PICTURE: GEVEN

Pilot misery

More than half of the world's airline pilots are no longer flying for a living, according to the first worldwide survey of the profession since the Covid-19 crisis.

The study, carried out by specialist aviation and pilot recruitment agency, GOOSE, in conjunction with aviation publisher, FlightGlobal, revealed 6% of pilots are employed in aviation in a non-flying role; 4% are working in another industry; and just 43% of pilots are doing the job they trained for.

The poll of almost 2,600 flight crew paints a picture of a community devastated economically and psychologically by the pandemic.

Flagship A320neo

Air Côte d'Ivoire, Ivory Coast's flagship carrier based in Abidjan, has taken delivery of its first A320neo, becoming the first operator of the type in the west African region.

This latest generation aircraft will join the carrier's existing Airbus fleet of six aircraft.

Congo orders

Six months after its first E2 order, Congo Airways has placed a firm order for two further E195-E2 jets. The four-aircraft deal has a total value of \$272 million at current list prices.

Desire Bantu, CEO of Congo Airways, said: "We see an opportunity in our market for Congo Airways to emerge [from the pandemic] stronger, which is why we are not waiting to place this further order. These new jets will allow us to extend our passenger and cargo operations regionally to high-demand destinations such as Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Abidjan."



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Looking over the ‘bloodbath’ of domestic competition, South African carrier, CemAir, is preparing to add its first narrow-body aircraft and branch out into regional flights.

Victoria Moores talks to CEO, Miles van der Molen, about the opportunities.

MILES AHEAD

Plucky Johannesburg-based domestic carrier, CemAir, is coming back fighting, despite the Covid-19 downturn and a bitter dispute with the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA), which grounded the airline for nine months in 2019.

For a man who has just been through two years of solid stress, CemAir CEO, Miles van der Molen, sounds surprisingly feisty.

“Just when we were coming out on the far side of the ridiculous grounding saga, hello Covid! So, yeah, what a miserable two years we’ve had. I’m pretty much punch-drunk. I just wake up in the morning, go and keep trying – just like yesterday. It’s been beyond brutal,” he admitted.

SACAA imposed two groundings on privately owned CemAir in late 2018 and early 2019. The carrier ultimately took the SACAA to court and overturned the rulings, but then had to renew its expired aircraft operator’s certificate (AOC). CemAir finally returned to the skies in late 2019, just before Covid struck.



A year on and the airline has emerged from these back-to-back crises, only to find the domestic market overloaded with capacity. CemAir’s January 2021 traffic was 80% down year-on-year.

Van der Molen said he is seeing a brutal “bloodbath” of price wars, which are completely unsustainable. “We’re just waiting for the first one to blink. I don’t know who’s got the deepest pockets, but somebody’s got to go,” he predicted.

However, there is a silver lining. The South African market has been reshaped, with state-owned carriers South African Airways (SAA) and South African Express (SA Express) halting flights. This has created an opportunity for CemAir to seize route rights and branch out into scheduled regional services, where competition is less fierce.

Continued
on Page 10



Miles van der Molen: “We like to return loyalty where we’ve received it.”

PICTURE: CEMAIR.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

“When things do start normalising, [regional] capacity will be down – because of all the people that left the market – and we’ll have access to markets that we didn’t really have before. The regional network that SAA had was their stronghold; the regional stuff had a lot of protection.”

Van der Molen is eyeing opportunities in Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia. These markets are not new to CemAir, because the company has a long history of contract flying and, more recently, repatriation flights.

“The DRC and Tanzania are the main ones we’d pitch at,” he said, referring to the SA Express rights. “Our next step is to fill in that space. For a lot of those passengers, travel is essential – people don’t travel to Kinshasa for a holiday – so they still need to go, even in difficult times.”

CemAir’s scheduled network is currently all-domestic and is served by seven Beechcraft 1900s, a De Havilland Dash 8-100, two Dash 8-Q300s, two Dash 8-400s, eight Mitsubishi CRJ200s and one CRJ900 – with another CRJ900 coming soon.

“With our intended expansion into the regional market, the CRJ900 is not going to have enough legs to fly to some of the further destinations, like Lagos. We need to upscale a notch,” van der Molen said.

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CemAir is, therefore, looking to lease up to three Airbus A319s, or lower-capacity 737NGs, from one of its existing partners, marking its narrow-body debut.

Relationships are important to van der Molen. Looking back at the turmoil of the past two years, he wants to reward the suppliers that stood by CemAir.

“That’s really what’s pulled us through,” he said. “We like to return loyalty where we’ve received it. During the grounding we had a very tough time, at a point when the world was having a particularly good time, airline-wise. And people who stood by us have first dibs at any [aircraft] deals that we do.”

CemAir will initially lease the new variant, but will look to buy further down the line. “We’re getting into, not only a type of aircraft that we don’t know, but also a class of aircraft that we don’t know. Leasing is a useful way to learn the lessons – not cheaply – but ‘less worse’ than when you own it.”

Timings for the regional launch have already slipped a bit – van der Molen was originally looking at December 2020 – but the opportunity is also still evolving. The new variant should now enter service at the end of the second quarter.

“It’s unlikely to start with three [of the new variant]. We’ll probably grow like we have with every other fleet – start with one or two, and then build from there incrementally. Practically speaking, you can’t operate an aircraft like that



Mixed fleet: Among other aircraft, CemAir operates two De Havilland Dash 8-Q300s.

PICTURE: CEMAIR.

Expressing little interest

In an earlier interview, van der Molen said he “wouldn’t close the door” to the idea of acquiring SA Express. So, when the opportunity came, did he consider it?

“We did look at it – glance at it – as a going concern,” he admitted. “We didn’t see any value in it because domestic [South Africa] is open skies, so we can do whatever we want, and regionally the routes they had were of interest, but certainly you weren’t going to fall over yourself to get them at any cost.”

“So, it was an easy decision. We just looked at it and thought this isn’t for us.”

However, CemAir did participate in the auction of SA Express’ assets, acquiring aircraft spares and a couple of airframes to part out.

“We benefited quite a lot,” admitted van der Molen. “The nice thing about Covid auctions is that nobody goes to them. So, it worked quite nicely in our favour.”

Van der Molen is conscious that CemAir’s fleet is “a mixed bag” of aircraft types. “We’re getting a little spread across types and that is something that we’re going to address,” he said.

In the meantime, access to spares is becoming an issue. “Support is keeping me up at night,” he said.

The Covid-19 downturn means there is far less belly freight, compounding the problem even further. “Getting parts in and out – anything – is so difficult, and then, when you have the fleet commonality [issues], you have so few options. So, that has delivered a lot of pain,” he concluded.

□ □ □ □ □

as a single-aircraft fleet. Our view is, over time, to expand that to a substantial fleet, but that’s the long-term view.”

Any new routes are likely to start with twice-weekly frequencies, building to daily. Van der Molen is particularly keen to start flying to Lagos and Luanda as soon as possible, but the regional expansion has also brought regulatory hurdles.

CemAir has been allocated various traffic rights under existing bilateral agreements,

including Angola, Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique and Nigeria, but some of these are yet to be confirmed by the other countries.

“We’ve found it quite challenging. As much as everybody in Africa beats the drum of open skies and the single African air transport market (SAATM), we’ve found that they really do drag their feet when it comes time to just acknowledge that we’ve been granted the frequencies by the government, under the terms of an existing agreement.

“We’ve been chasing frequencies that we were allocated three-and-a-half years ago for Botswana; we still haven’t actually got the rest of the [regulatory] admin done,” he revealed.

CemAir’s regional flying will mainly focus on west Africa, steering away from stronger incumbent players in the east, such as Ethiopian Airlines and Kenya Airways. Instead, CemAir has formed new interline agreements with Ethiopian Airlines (January 2021) and Africa-focused Qatar Airlines (February 2021), to boost feed into its new network.

“Before, those options weren’t really available to us, because the existing [South African] carriers had the market pretty much sewn up,” van der Molen said. “But now, those [foreign] carriers are looking for new friends.”

CemAir will be looking to add further airline partnerships, particularly in west Africa, and van der Molen would love to team up with other South African players. “We’ve taken the view that, at times like this, collectively we can do better than individually,” he said, before pointing out that South African airlines tended to be “very insular”.

After a brutal two years, CemAir has emerged to fight its next battle. “If anything, we’ve proven our resilience,” said van der Molen. “We certainly see ourselves as standing on the far side of it. We’re going to take some battle damage, but we have very limited debt exposure and strong relationships. Of course, one can always take a shot to the chest. For now, we don’t see ourselves as clinging on to the edge, but it is time to be very, very careful.”



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L'IMBROGLIO TUNISAIR

La compagnie tunisienne connaît des difficultés chroniques depuis des années. La PDG Olfa Hamdi, nommée début janvier 2021, a été révoquée le 22 février dernier. Depuis, les pourparlers se multiplient. Le point avec **Anuradha Deenapanray et Vincent Chappard**.

Comme la majorité des compagnies aériennes mondiales, Tunisair est secouée par les effets du Covid-19. Or, la crise a commencé bien avant.

Aujourd'hui, il y a urgence à sauver la gazelle d'Afrique du Nord. Elle ne peut pas rester sous perfusion ou dépendre des plans de sauvetage ad vitam. Il est impérieux de prendre des mesures draconiennes en matière de gestion financière et des ressources humaines, et de bonne gouvernance pour qu'un énième plan de redressement et de relance soit efficace.

Pourtant, Tunisair a contribué énormément à la croissance touristique et économique de la Tunisie depuis son lancement en 1948.

En 2020, la compagnie a enregistré une baisse de 70% de son chiffre d'affaires. Le nombre de passagers toutes activités confondues a diminué de 80% et ses revenus de transport de 77%, malgré une amélioration de la recette moyenne par passager de 13% pour les vols réguliers.

Il y a donc une urgence absolue de restructurer la compagnie avant même de

songer aux réformes et à sa relance. C'est un dossier brûlant et prioritaire pour le nouveau ministre du Transport et de la Logistique, Moez Chakchouk.

À la mi-février, il déclarait à la presse locale, que Tunisair se trouve dans « de grandes difficultés financières et on est incapable de payer les salaires, ni d'honorer nos engagements

envers les fournisseurs ». Le ministre précisait d'autre part que le plan de restructuration établi en accord avec l'UGTT, n'avait pas été appliqué à 100%. Ce serait l'une des principales causes de l'instabilité de la compagnie.

Selon le ministre, une intervention de l'État est indispensable. Moez Chakchouk a également exclu toute privatisation de Tunisair

Il y a une urgence absolue de restructurer la compagnie avant même de songer aux réformes et à sa relance.

IMAGE : AIRBUS



SUMMARY

TUNISAIR IN TURMOIL

Tunisair is in crisis. Its latest CEO, appointed in January, lasted just seven weeks before she was sacked. The country's minister of transport has admitted the airline is "in great financial difficulty", salaries are not being paid, union members are up in arms, and debts are being called in. Anuradha Deenapanray and Vincent Chappard report.

For nearly three quarters of a century – since its foundation in 1948 – Tunisair has contributed hugely to Tunisia's tourism industry.

However, in recent years, even before the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, the carrier has been experiencing financial turmoil.

Last year, the airline recorded a 70% drop in revenue, while the number of passengers across all activities fell by 80% and its transport revenues by 77%, despite an improvement in the average revenue per passenger of 13% for scheduled flights.

Tunisia's new minister of transport and logistics, Moez Chakchouk, is currently treating the restructuring of the airline as a major priority, before considering how any relaunch might work.

In mid-February he admitted: "Tunisair is in great financial difficulty and we are unable to pay salaries or to honour our commitments to suppliers."

The minister also said that the restructuring plan drawn up in agreement with the UGTT – the Tunisian general labour union – had not been fully implemented. Industry observers believe this to be one of the major causes of the airline's current instability.

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According to the minister, state intervention is vital and he ruled out both privatisation of Tunisair, or any recourse to a strategic partner.

In early January, the appointment of Olfa Hamdi as Tunisair's new CEO, to replace Elyes Mnaki, had brought signs of hope. The new CEO's mission was 'to develop a strategic action plan to save and promote Tunisair in order to face international competition', especially from European and African companies.

Hamdi also established a new strategic committee

of independent advisors, made up of nine senior players from the local and international aviation world. But it was soon clear that the crisis was far from stabilising.

On February 18 TAV Tunisie, a local subsidiary of the Turkish company, TAV Airports, that manages the Tunisian airports of Enfidha-Hammamet and Monastir Habib Bourguiba, announced the seizure of €8 million (\$9.65m) from Tunisair, partially to cover a debt estimated at €20 million, excluding penalty costs, that dated from 2015.

On the following day the minister organised a crisis meeting, in the presence of Hamdi, representatives of TAV Tunisie, and the Office of Civil Aviation and Airports (OACA), to address the financial dispute.

At midday that day, the UGTT called a strike during protests at the company's headquarters in Tunis. Its secretary general, Nourredine Taboudi, called for a rescue plan and rejection of privatisation.



Or, le lundi 22 février, il y eut un coup de théâtre dans ce feuilleton : l'éviction d'Olfa Hamdi.

IMAGE : WIKIMEDIA

After long discussions, the transport minister gave hope with the announcement of an agreement between Tunisair and TAV Tunisia on the rescheduling of the debt and the payment of social contributions of OACA agents.

However, just three days later, on February 22, there was a dramatic turn of events when Hamdi was dismissed.

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Chakchouk explained the decision to dismiss Hamdi, only seven weeks after her appointment, by saying that she had "made many mistakes and also disclosed confidential documents".

The day before, Hamdi had responded to attacks by the UGTT union on her Facebook account: "I refused to award a financial advance and I counted on Mr Noureddine's understanding of the difficult situation of the company" she wrote, stressing that a strike would have a major effect on Tunisair.

At the beginning of March, Khaled Chelly took over the management of Tunisair.

The new CEO was, notably, deputy managing director of the national airline between 2012 and 2014 and managing director of the Tunisian Civil Aviation and Airports Authority (OACA).

He now has the difficult task of getting Tunisair out of the crisis. ■

PDG de Tunisair en remplacement à Elyes Mnaki début janvier devait apporter un brin d'espoir. Elle avait pour mission : « développer un plan d'action stratégique pour sauver et promouvoir Tunisair afin de faire face à la concurrence internationale, en particulier des compagnies européennes et africaines ». Olfa Hamdi avait d'ailleurs établi un nouveau comité stratégique de conseillers indépendants formé de neuf personnalités du monde aérien local et international.

Toutefois, la situation ne semblait pas se décanter.

Le 18 février, TAV Tunisie, filiale locale de la compagnie turque TAV Airports, qui gère les aéroports d'Enfidha-Hammamet et de Monastir Habib Bourguiba, annonçait la saisie conservatoire sur le compte de Tunisair de 8 millions d'euros en guise de recouvrement partiel pour la totalité d'une dette estimée à 20 millions d'euros, excluant les frais de pénalité datant de 2015.

Le lendemain, le ministre organisait une session de travail en présence de la nouvelle PDG de Tunisair de même que des représentants de TAV Tunisie et de l'Office de l'aviation civile et des aéroports (OACA) pour aborder le contentieux financier.

À la mi-journée, le principal syndicat l'UGTT appelait à une grève lors des manifestations au siège de la compagnie à Tunis. Son secrétaire général Noureddine Taboudi, réclamait un plan de sauvetage et le refus d'une privatisation.

Après de longues discussions, le ministre du Transport donna un espoir avec l'annonce d'un accord entre Tunisair et TAV Tunisie sur le rééchelonnement de la dette et le paiement par la TAV des cotisations sociales des agents de l'OACA, mis à la disposition de l'exploitant aéroportuaire.

Or, le lundi 22 février, il y eut un coup de théâtre dans ce feuilleton : l'éviction d'Olfa Hamdi.

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Moez Chakchouk, a expliqué la décision de révoquer Olfa Hamdi environ sept semaines après sa nomination. Selon lui, cette dernière « a commis beaucoup d'erreurs, n'a pas respecté le droit de réserve » en divulguant des documents internes.

La veille, Olfa Hamdi répondait aux attaques du syndicat UGTT sur son compte Facebook.

« J'ai refusé d'attribuer une avance financière et j'ai compté sur la compréhension de M. Noureddine par rapport à la situation difficile de la compagnie », écrivait-elle, en soulignant qu'une grève aurait des effets majeurs sur Tunisair. « J'allais annoncer le programme de sauvetage de la gazelle lors d'une conférence de presse à huit heures du matin. »

De nombreuses voix s'élèvent en effet sur la mainmise de l'UGTT sur la gestion interne de la compagnie et la lourdeur administrative de Tunisair.

Côté opérationnel, le premier chantier de Tunisair est celui de la remise en service de sa flotte essentiellement pour des raisons de maintenance. Un tiers de sa flotte est opérationnelle à ce jour. Il s'agit d'assurer la réussite de la saison estivale et la relance économique.

Côté finance, les accords sur l'échelonnement des dettes de Tunisair devaient être signés le 5 mars 2021 entre les parties concernées.

Début mars, Khaled Chelly a repris en main la direction de Tunisair. Le nouveau PDG est un homme du sérail. Il a notamment été directeur général adjoint de la compagnie nationale entre 2012 et 2014 et DG de l'OACA. Il a désormais la difficile mission de sortir Tunisair de la crise.

Au-delà des difficultés de Tunisair, il est aussi essentiel de repenser la politique du transport aérien et de tout l'écosystème de l'aviation au niveau national. ■

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Out of hibernation: Cabo Verde Airlines' Boeing 757s were stored in the US during the pandemic shutdown.

PICTURE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

CVA growth may hinge on intercontinental gateway

Linking four continents through its hub offshore from west Africa remains Cabo Verde Airlines' target as it emerges from Covid-19 shutdown.
Alan Dron reports.

Like most carriers, Cabo Verde Airlines (CVA) has been battered by the global pandemic. The Cabo Verde Government closed the archipelago's borders in March 2020 and, apart from repatriation flights for around four months after that date, CVA was effectively grounded.

The borders reopened in October, but international restrictions have meant that flights worldwide remain at a fraction of normal.

Loftleidir Cabo Verde, a subsidiary of charter and ACMI (wet lease) specialist Loftleidir Icelandic, acquired a majority stake in CVA in 2019, some two years after it won a management contract for the small carrier.

Currently, Loftleidir Cabo Verde holds 51% of the airline, with the government taking 39% and the other 10% held by employees, local investors, and Cabo Verdeans overseas.

CEO, Erlendur Svavarsson, said that CVA's first year under Loftleidir Cabo Verde had seen a significant increase in passenger numbers, but that progress had halted with the onset of the pandemic.

However, its aim remains to establish a hub linking Europe, Africa, and North and South America, through Amílcar Cabral International Airport on Sal Island. "Connecting four continents is the mission."



With this in mind, the country's government has made the first move to allow CVA to access new funding sources to allow it to recover.

In March, it issued a sovereign guarantee for €4 million (\$4.8 million) that will allow CVA to access funding from the country's commercial banks.

This initial infusion of money was welcome, Svavarsson said, but was only a first step in refinancing the airline. There were still conversations to be had with commercial creditors and others in order to fulfil all the conditions to get the airline up and running.

The aim, he added, was to obtain both debt and equity financing and to attract new investors. "We expect, in the coming weeks, to roll out more of the plan and to bring in additional financing."

CVA's fleet consists of three Boeing 757-200s, but Svavarsson

said: "We anticipate, in line with the business plan, we will have to scale down that fleet, initially to perhaps two aircraft."

CVA's aircraft were moved to long-term storage at Opa Locka, Florida, last June, although the first emerged from hibernation in early March.

Svavarsson added, the 757 remains firmly in CVA's plans: "It's a fantastic aircraft for long, thin routes." Flights to Paris, Milan and Rome took around six hours, Boston more than seven, and the aircraft was ideal for such sectors.

"Looking into the future, there are some new and interesting models out there that might fit the bill, but that's something we would have to look at."



Candidates for a 757 replacement could be the longer-range versions of the Airbus A321neo, or even the smaller Airbus A220, he suggested: "It's a wonderful machine that can do fairly long sectors and there's a plan to extend the range of that aircraft even further."

"You need a smaller passenger load than you do for the [A321]LR or the 757, so that would fit very well with our strategy of expanding into west Africa."

Africa is a major potential market for CVA, especially under the liberalised air regime envisaged by the Yamoussoukro Decision, the 1999 pact by 44 African Union nations to allow 'open skies' agreements between them.

The decision became binding in 2002 but its implementation has, for years, been delayed by reluctance among many African countries to open up their markets to international competition.

In 2018, in another attempt to implement the Yamoussoukro Decision, the single African air transport market (SAATM) was launched.

So far, 34 countries have agreed to the SAATM but only 10 (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Mozambique, Niger, Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Togo) have fully implemented it.

"We have, so far, under-utilised the opportunities built into the Yamoussoukro Decision, as well as the Lusophone [Portuguese-speaking] countries," said Svavarsson. "We would use the Yamoussoukro Decision to fit into our hub on Sal Island for long-haul connections to South America." ■

GHANA NATIONAL AIRLINE TAKES ANOTHER STEP FORWARD

EgyptAir's help has been enlisted to help dream become a reality. **Alan Dron reports.**

While details of EgyptAir's assistance have still to be made public, the Egyptian flag-carrier signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Ghanaian Government in October 2020 to help the west African state create a new flag-carrier.

EgyptAir will become a 'strategic partner' in establishing the new airline; it declined to give further details.

The new airline is described as being 'affiliated' with the Ghanaian Government, rather than state-owned. It is thought that once the government has established the carrier, it will then take a back seat, allowing aviation industry professionals to run the operation.

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This is in contrast to many African national airlines, which suffer from government control or interference.

Accra is likely to have noted that the continent's most consistently successful airline, Ethiopian, is state-controlled but that the Addis Ababa-based government takes a hands-off attitude to its operations.

Ghana has been without a national carrier since Ghana International Airlines (GIA) collapsed in 2010. GIA replaced the heavily indebted Ghana Airways in 2005.



Up in the air: Ghana has signed an as-yet-unconfirmed commitment for three Boeing 787-9s. PICTURE: BOEING.

At 2019's Dubai Airshow, the Ghanaian Government signed an MoU with Boeing for three 787-9s for a new national carrier, plus a letter of intent for 'up to six' De Havilland Canada Dash 8-400 turboprops. Neither commitment has yet been firmed up.

Victor Brobbey, a lecturer at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, told *African Aerospace* that he is sceptical about the new airline getting off the ground. His view stems from past experience of national airlines not being well-managed. This had been the case with Ghana Airways, while Ghana International Airlines had been too heavily burdened by debt.

However, he added, the newly refurbished Kotoka International Airport in Accra was under-utilised "so there's some economic rationale for starting the new national airline".

Ghana believes Kotoka can become a new west African hub.

Additionally, said Brobbey, economic developments in the country tended to follow its four-year electoral period. And, with president Nana Akufo-Addo having recently been re-elected, his government would be keen to chalk up achievements, such as the successful creation of a new national airline.

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Air Sénégal et l'Aéroport international Blaise-Diagne (AIBD) ont récemment signé un accord pour la création d'un centre MRO. Vincent Chappard a enquêté sur les projets du hub aérien de Dakar.

LA MRO ÉMERGE À DAKAR

Ce shop MRO vise d'abord à transformer des centres de coûts en centres de profits. Sa création s'aligne au développement du hub aérien de Dakar et répond aux exigences du Plan Sénégal Émergent. Il s'agit également d'assurer le transfert de savoir-faire et de compétences à la jeunesse sénégalaise ainsi que la maîtrise des charges d'exploitation de la compagnie.

Le centre de maintenance accueillera les avions de la famille Airbus (A320, A330 et A340), les Boeing 737 et les moteurs (CFM56 et Trent 7000). Visant une certification ANACIM, EASA et FAA, il répondra non seulement aux besoins de la compagnie nationale mais également aux demandes régionales et internationales. Les travaux devraient démarrer courant 2021 et s'achever en 2023.

En parallèle, Air Sénégal prépare la mise en place d'une académie des Métiers du Transport Aérien en partenariat avec l'AIBD pour former la main d'œuvre locale.



Côté aéroport, l'AIBD a obtenu sa certification niveau 2 du programme « Airport Carbon Accreditation » de l'ACI. L'Aéroport international de Dakar a également pris les devants dans la gestion de la crise du Covid-19. Des mesures rapides ont été prises pour assurer la continuité du service (cargo, rapatriement, vols spéciaux, ...) dans les conditions sanitaires requises.

Selon son directeur général Ibrahima Kane, grâce au soutien étatique et ses activités de résilience, Air Sénégal présente une situation opérationnelle et financière « parfaitement soutenable ». Elle a pu ainsi mettre en œuvre son plan de relance d'après crise.

Le DG de la compagnie estime que 2021 serait



Air Sénégal et l'aéroport international Blaise Diagne travaillent ensemble sur un centre MRO.

IMAGES: AIR SÉNÉGAL ET AIBD.

une année de résilience. « Pour soutenir les efforts déjà enregistrés durant le deuxième semestre de 2020, nous avons opté pour une réouverture progressive de notre réseau notamment Ziguinchor et Cap Skirring (domestique), Abidjan, Conakry, Nouakchott, Banjul, Bamako, Praia (régional) de même que Paris, Barcelone (via Casablanca) et récemment Milan (intercontinental). »

Air Sénégal prévoit d'ouvrir de nouvelles routes fin mars à savoir Lyon, Marseille, Cotonou, Douala et Libreville.

« Nous venons également d'introduire une requête formelle auprès du Département d'État Américain aux Transports pour l'exploitation d'une ligne commerciale directe entre Dakar et les métropoles de New York et Washington DC à partir de septembre prochain », poursuit Ibrahima Kane.

Face à l'incertitude causée par la situation sanitaire, la fermeture de certaines frontières et les mesures imposées par plusieurs États, Air Sénégal adopte une stratégie de planification à court terme tout en étudiant les opportunités et les partenariats avec d'autres compagnies.

Elle entend ainsi tirer son épingle du jeu et mettre à profit tout son potentiel. ■

SUMMARY

DAKAR MRO CENTRE BOOSTS EMERGING SENEGAL PLAN

Air Senegal and Blaise Diagne International Airport (AIBD) have jointly signed an agreement to open a maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) centre in Dakar, writes Vincent Chappard.

Its creation complements the development of the Dakar air hub and meets the specifics of the 'emerging Senegal plan'.

It is also designed to ensure the transfer of skills to Senegalese youth, as well as to control operating costs.

The maintenance centre will service aircraft of the Airbus family (A320, A330 and A340); Boeing 737s; and engines including the CFM56 and Rolls-Royce's Trent 7000.

The MRO is aiming for certification from Senegal's National Agency of Civil Aviation and Meteorology (ANACIM), the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

It will meet the needs of the national airline, as well as regional and international requirements.

Work is expected to start this year with completion scheduled for 2023.

At the same time, Air Senegal is preparing to establish an air transport trades academy in partnership with AIBD, to further enhance the local workforce skills.

According to the airline's CEO, Ibrahima Kane, 2021 will be a year of resilience. "To support the efforts already recorded during the second half of 2020, we have gradually reopened our network, in particular to Ziguinchor and Cap Skirring (domestic); Abidjan, Conakry, Nouakchott, Banjul, Bamako and Praia (regional); along with intercontinental flights to Paris, Barcelona (via Casablanca) and Milan," he said.

There are also plans to open new routes shortly to Lyon, Marseille, Cotonou, Douala and Libreville, while a request has been submitted for direct flights to Washington DC and New York from September. ■

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Taking off: United Nigeria focused on niche domestic operations.

PICTURE: UNITED NIGERIA.

Right: Ibom Air airline was voted Nigeria's best.

PICTURE: IBOM AIR



As we turn the spotlight on Nigeria, Alan Peaford explains why the country is a jewel just waiting to be polished.

AFRICA'S HIDDEN GEM

With its population passing the 200 million mark, it is no wonder that Nigeria is seen as potentially the jewel in the crown of the African aviation market.

According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), there are an incredible 241,000 people directly supported by the aviation industry in the west African country.

The industry represents a \$1.7 billion contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) and yet, incredibly, the country still does not have its own national carrier.

Instead, the industry is fractured and littered with the broken dreams of entrepreneurs who saw the potential and launched their own carriers.

At the last count, there were around 23 carriers operating domestically. With 20 airports and so many more airstrips and heliports, it becomes all the more apparent why so many are fascinated by the allure of the business.

The country's civil aviation authority is well aware of the potential. IATA estimates that, over the next 20 years, Nigeria's air transport sector could grow by 174%, resulting in an additional 9.4 billion passenger journeys.

There are many start-ups lining up to begin operations. Many eyes have been on Green Africa since it launched with a large order for Airbus A220s, but it is still working towards gaining its air operator's certificate (AOC).

Others, such as United Nigeria, have focused more on niche domestic operations.

The airline which was voted Nigeria's best – Ibom Air – has been working from Uyo, state capital of Akwa Ibom, in south Nigeria, and has developed an admiring fan base. Its CEO, Mfon Udom, believes Nigeria has been disadvantaged by a lack of aviation services. He cites the high cost of insurance – provided by foreign institutions who are over pessimistic about risk in the country. Others have concerns about the lack of MRO.

But the situation is moving. Nigeria is exciting and, with more airports due, increased oil and gas operations, the jewel is ready for polishing. ■

GOVERNMENT TO INVEST IN POWER OF 10 NEW AIRPORTS

Alan Dron reports on plans to increase the country's travel facilities.

The Nigerian Government has launched ambitious plans to boost the country's airport provision.

Aviation Minister, Hadi Sirika, said that 10 new airports will be built across the country, as part of a continuing plan to increase the ability of citizens and visitors to easily access air travel.

A construction initiative of this scale will increase the number of airports in Africa's most populous country by close to 50%, he said.

The minister, appearing before the Nigerian Senate's aviation committee to explain his ministry's 2021 budget proposals, did not give precise locations for the planned new facilities, but said they would be located in several states, including Anambra, Benue, Ekiti, Nasarawa, Ebonyi, and Gombe.

He added that existing airports in the states of Kebbi, Osabi, and Dutse would be refurbished, but did not make clear whether the rejuvenated airports were being counted as part of the overall total of 10.

Repeated attempts to obtain clarification from the aviation ministry by *African Aerospace* were unsuccessful,

but it is believed that regional governments will have a role in the creation of airports in their own states.

Sirika said that the building of new airports was part of the recovery plan for the country's civil aviation sector, instigated in 2015 by president Muhammadu Buhari's government. "From 2015 till now, we've seen a lot of growth in civil aviation, the number of airports is increasing. So far, about seven airports have been added to the map, some of them completed, others under construction," said the minister.

He added that the government was tackling the problem of outdated or unserviceable equipment at existing Nigerian airports, but that this had to be handled one airport at a time, depending on their safety requirements, due to funding limitations.

Sirika reiterated the need for Nigeria to improve its airport infrastructure during a virtual conference with African aviation specialists in February, noting that: "We need to put in place enabling policies to ensure that our aviation sector is effectively positioned to be the air transport hub for Africa." ■



Hadi Sirika: "So far, about seven airports have been added to the map, some of them completed, others under construction."

PICTURE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.



Two start-up airlines are taking to the skies and several incumbents – including Air Peace, Azman Air and Dana Air – are growing their fleets. Victoria Moores reports.



Busy: Dana Air is currently evaluating possible additions to the fleet. PICTURE: DANA AIR.

NIGEARING UP!

BULLISH AIRLINES BUCK THE GLOBAL TREND

“We’re still powering ahead. January 2021 has been the best January ever.”
OBI MBANUZUO



According to Dana Air chief operating officer, Obi Mbanuzuo, 2021 is the time to ‘kick on’ following the problems of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“By the time we hit September [2020], we were kind of back on track with what we had planned to do – even before the lockdown,” he explained.

“We’re still powering ahead. January 2021 has been the best January ever – and I’m going back seven or eight years. And February, so far, is looking very good as well. So, we’re very optimistic about how things are going domestically.”

Nigeria reported its first Covid-19 case in February 2020 and went into lockdown from late March to June. Domestic operator, Dana, halted flights even before lockdown began, because traffic simply dried up. “There was absolutely no flying,” Mbanuzuo said.

Domestic flights were allowed to resume from early July and five key airports progressively reopened – Abuja, Lagos, Kano, Owerri and Port Harcourt – as new Covid procedures were rolled out.

By the fourth quarter of 2020, Dana’s traffic was edging ahead of pre-Covid levels. Now, in 2021, Dana is tracking an 85% load factor and expecting to exceed the one million passengers that it carried in 2019.

Nigeria’s domestic airports have reopened, but international flights remain

limited to Abuja and Lagos, compared with about eight international gateways in more normal times. “Even international is just waiting,” Mbanuzuo said. “People can’t wait to get back to flying.”

The country experienced a further wave of infection going into 2021. However, Mbanuzuo said current restrictions are nothing like the first lockdown. “We came out of that and we’ve been open ever since. There’s been a lot of discussions, saying we might reintroduce partial measures, but I don’t think they’re going to shut down aviation.”

Instead, the industry is gearing up. Mbanuzuo said Dana is currently evaluating additional Boeing 737-300s and its first Embraer 190 E1s, for entry into service in the fourth quarter of 2021, or in 2022.

“These discussions restarted recently,” he said. “As long as we can get the financing right, I think we could get some good deals. Our traffic is on the up-and-up, so we’re trying to take advantage of this unique position, where we’re looking for aeroplanes while everyone else is sending them back.”

Dana currently operates one MD82, three Boeing MD83s, and two 737-300s. In fact, the 737-300s entered commercial service with Dana in mid-February 2020, just as the world went into lockdown. However, some of the MDs will hit their D-checks in 2022, triggering their retirement.

Smart move: Green Africa unveiled its new crew uniform in February.
PICTURE: GREEN AFRICA.



Continental first: Air Peace takes delivery of the first E2 for Africa.
PICTURE: EMBRAER.



PICTURE: AIR PEACE

Our ‘no-city-left-behind’ initiative is underpinned by our goal to reduce the air transportation burden of Africans.

ALLEN ONYEMA

“For Dana Air, right now, financially the [Boeing 737] Classics make sense. The ones we own, we purchased outright. Going down the line, the Classics are 140 seaters, the Embraers are closer to 110, so it’s simply to get the market-sizing right in certain places,” Mbanuzuo said.

One option would be to take a pair of 737-300s later in 2021, followed by a pair of Embraers in 2022. This will avoid the immediate complexity of a new aircraft type and allow Dana to bring in the Embraers as it phases out its MDs. Ultimately, the 737-300s will be replaced with 737NGs, which would operate alongside the Embraers.

“We have a fleet of six [aircraft in total]. I don’t think we’re going to go past 10,” Mbanuzuo said, adding that this could potentially be an even split between 737s and Embraers.

Dana is also hoping to seize the opportunity to deepen collaborations with other Nigerian airlines. It already interlines with Aero Contractors, Ibom Air, Max Air, and Med-View Airline.

Meanwhile, Nigeria’s Air Peace took delivery of the first Embraer E2 on the African continent in January 2021, followed by a second in late February.

Air Peace has 13 E195-E2s on firm order and holds purchase rights on a further 17, valued at \$2.2 billion at list prices.

A total of three E195-E2s are

scheduled to arrive with Air Peace in 2021, replacing Boeing 737 Classics. The new aircraft will be used to enhance domestic and regional connectivity.

“The E195-E2 aircraft will further help us actualise our ambition of connecting, not just the whole of Nigeria, but the entire African continent, while feeding long-haul flights from our Lagos hub,” said Air Peace chairman and CEO, Allen Onyema.

“The acquisition will enable us to deliver on our ‘no-city-left-behind’ initiative, which is underpinned by our goal to reduce the air transportation burden of Africans.”

With the January delivery, Air Peace also became the global launch customer for Embraer’s staggered premium-cabin seating design. The aircraft are configured in a 124-seat dual-class layout, including the 12 premium seats, which have a 51-inch pitch and direct aisle access.

“This is a fabulous start to the year for everybody at Air Peace and Embraer,” said Embraer commercial aviation Europe, Middle East and Africa VP, Cesar Pereira.

Beyond the new Embraers, Air Peace also operates eight ERJ-145s, one Dornier 328 jet, five 737-500s, eight 737-300s and three 777s

“We’re taking our operations several notches higher in 2021,” Air Peace announced at the start of the year.

Continued on Page 22



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

The airline, which had its International Air Transport Association (IATA) operational safety audit (IOSA) certificate renewed for the third time in December 2020, was created in 2013 and currently serves 16 domestic, five regional, and two long-haul routes.

An Air Peace spokesman said the airline is looking to expand its domestic network to include Bauchi, Katsina and Port Harcourt Air Force Base.

Air Peace already serves a wide range of Nigerian cities and its regional network currently covers Accra (Ghana), Banjul (Gambia), Dakar (Senegal), Freetown (Sierra Leone) and Monrovia (Liberia). It is also eyeing new routes to Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Douala (Cameroon), Lomé (Togo), and Niamey (Niger).

Air Peace is also looking to ramp up its long-haul operations. During the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown, Air Peace gained experience of flying further afield, operating a series of repatriation flights to Israel, China, Turkey, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the UK, using its 777s.

Another Nigerian carrier looking to expand is Kano-based domestic carrier, Azman Air, which currently operates flights to 10 destinations within Nigeria.

"The management at Azman Air have

aircraft will serve thinner domestic routes.

"We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things," Azman Air said in late February. This also seems to be true, looking out across the wider Nigerian market.

Two new airlines are poised for lift-off in 2021.

The first, United Nigeria, secured its air operator's certificate in early February 2021 and launched ERJ-145 operations on February 12.

Enugu-based United Nigeria plans to cross-connect several domestic points within the country, starting with Abuja, Asaba, Enugu and Lagos. Flights to Owerri and Port Harcourt are also on the radar.

United Nigeria has sourced four ERJ-145s from the US, where they were previously operated by commuter airline, ExpressJet.

A second start-up—value airline Green Africa Airways—is also finalising its launch.

Green Africa Airways is the brainchild of former Morgan Stanley investment banker Babawande Afolabi, who will lead the start-up as CEO.

"I've always been fascinated by transportation; buses, railways, planes and so on. However, I never thought—not even in my wildest imagination—that someday I would want to start an airline,"

The vision remains as strong as ever: to build Green Africa into a world-class value carrier that will create a better future for people and be a catalyst for positive change.

TOM HORTON

□ □ □ □ □

Horton said. "I believe in the strategic importance of the relationship between the US, Nigeria, and the continent of Africa at large. And I look forward to Green Africa bringing our two regions even closer together in the years ahead."

The industry veteran acknowledged that the Green Africa project has been in the making for about eight years, because of global economic cycles and industry challenges. "Through it all, the vision remains as strong as ever: to build Green Africa into a world-class value carrier that will create a better future for people and be a catalyst for positive change. Green Africa is now gearing up to enter into service," he said.

Lagos-based Green Africa plans to operate domestic flights within Nigeria and then build a pan-African network.

The biggest outstanding question is what aircraft type it will operate. Green Africa originally committed to 50 firm 737 MAX 8s and 50 options in late 2018, but as the MAX grounding rolled on, it announced plans to acquire 50 Airbus A220-300s in February 2020. However, most recently, Green Africa has been tipped to start operations with ATR 72s.

After several timeline and aircraft shifts, Green Africa is not giving much away about its final type or specific launch date. However, crew training is under way in Toulouse, France, where both Airbus and ATR are based.

"Our first set of 'G-crew' has been trained and we currently have more going through training in Toulouse for their type-rating training," revealed Green Africa president and COO, Neil Mills.

"The [crew uniform] reveal is a reflection of how far we've come and how close we are now to finally taking off," Mills said, in February. "We are working closely with the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority on our ongoing AOC certification process."

Green Africa has moved into a new Lagos headquarters, which also has an in-house training facility. The start-up also plans to have its own maintenance and engineering organisation, led by Nathan Smith.

"My vision was to work with an airline that would provide the opportunity to create an elite maintenance and engineering organisation team that would be the best in Nigeria, west Africa and the African continent," Smith said.

"With the creation of a successful all-Nigerian engineering team, other airlines would be driven to follow Green Africa's lead and provide opportunity and development for Nigerian engineers. This was my reason for returning to Nigeria." ■



concluded a 'mega plan' to dominate the Nigeria aviation market in 2021," Azman said.

Privately owned Azman operates one 737-300 and four 737-500s, plus a newly acquired A340-600.

Its first A340, registered 5N-AAM, arrived back from its C-check in Abu Dhabi on February 19. "All is set as we kick-start preparation for the inaugural flight with our Airbus A340-600," Azman Air said, fondly referring to its new aircraft as 'The Big Bird'.

Not content with one new long-haul aircraft, ambitious Azman plans to double its entire fleet in 2021, adding a second A340-600, three 737-800s and five regional aircraft.

The A340s will be deployed on long-haul flights from Kano to China, Dubai and Jeddah (Saudi Arabia); the three 737-800s will be used for expansion to other African markets, while the five regional

Afolabi said at Green Africa's crew uniform unveil on February 13.

Afolabi has been working on the project for seven years and is hoping for a 2021 launch.

"It takes more than one tree to make a forest. The Green Africa journey is the result of many people who have taken, and continue to take, personal, professional and financial bets on our mission," Afolabi said. "Thanks to everyone's contribution, Green Africa is now just about to take off."

One of the investors backing Green Africa is former American Airlines chairman and CEO, Tom Horton, who got involved in the project in 2013 and is a founding board member.

"In order for Nigeria and the African continent to fully realise their potential, the need for safe, affordable, and reliable air travel cannot be overemphasised,"

Preparing for action: Airbus and Green Africa announced a strategic partnership with a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for 50 A220s on February 13 2020.

PICTURE: AIRBUS

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In September, West Africa's largest airline, Air Peace, took delivery of our E195-E2 Profit Hunter aircraft.

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The Nigerian Air Force (NAF) and navy (NN) are receiving new aircraft to enhance maritime security as part of the national security and waterways protection infrastructure, better known as the 'deep blue' project. Erwan de Cherisey reports.

Deep blue, which is valued at \$195 million, involves a major equipment procurement effort being conducted by Israeli company, Blue Octagon/HLSI Security Systems and Technologies, on behalf of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA).

Several patrol boats and fast craft have been acquired, as well as a number of manned and unmanned aircraft.

As per the programme, air assets acquired by NIMASA are to be operated on its behalf by the NAF and the NN.

The former is set to fly two special mission aircraft, procured under deep blue, from the Benin Air Base, which is already home to the two ATR-42-500MPs of the 107 Air Maritime Group. Although no official statement has yet been made regarding the type of special mission aircraft to be delivered, a video released by NIMASA shows two Cessna Citation CJ3s in a dark grey paint scheme, which appear identical to the two aircraft that are being outfitted by Bird Aerosystems of Israel.

Both aircraft are being equipped with the airborne surveillance, information and observation (ASIO) solution, which includes a search radar and an electro-optical/infrared (EO/IR) gimbaled payload under the aircraft's fuselage, with a control station for the sensors installed in the cabin.



The ASIO system provides full integration of the different sensors, real-time data sharing with a ground base, as well as platforms equipped with the necessary command and control suite. The ASIO has already achieved commercial success in Africa, with one Cessna Citation fitted with this solution having been delivered to Angola in 2017.

Mexico has also procured three ASIO-equipped Citations for critical infrastructure protection. It is not known which sensor suite has been selected by Nigeria.

The delivery of the two CJ3s should effectively double the maritime surveillance capabilities of the NAF, which have so far depended on its two ATR-42s, although, due to the acute need for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) support in inland operations against Boko Haram, these have often been deployed away from the shores.

It is understood (although not yet



Shipshape: The Tekever AR3 UAV is launched using a catapult and recovered by parachute, or with a net.

PICTURE: TEKEVER.

Inset: A video released by NIMASA shows two Cessna Citation CJ3s in a dark grey paint scheme, which appear identical to two aircraft being outfitted by Bird Aerosystems of Israel.

PICTURE: BIRD AEROSYSTEMS.

Out of the blue – maritime security gets a boost

confirmed) that Nigeria is also set to receive Bird Aerosystems' ocean surveillance control and reconnaissance (OSCAR) data integration software.

This should allow the fusing of the information collected by the different platforms procured under deep blue, including the CJ3s, unmanned air vehicles (UAVs), and vessels, together with such information as provided by the automatic identification systems (AIS) of the ships operating inside Nigeria's territorial waters and exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

The NN has received an undisclosed number of Portuguese-made Tekever AR3 UAVs, as confirmed by photographs released on social media showing navy officers inspecting crates containing the disassembled aircraft at Lagos, alongside customs and NIMASA authorities.

The AR3 is intended for shipborne operations. It is launched using a catapult and recovered by parachute, or with a net. Its endurance can reach 16 hours, with a range of 54 nautical miles. The maximum

payload is four kilograms and it can include EO and IR sensors.

The NAF may also have received UAVs under deep blue, with some sources pointing to the delivery of at least two South Korean-made Uconsystem Remoeye-002Bs.

The latter are electric hand-launched aircraft with a range of 10km and an endurance of 60 minutes.

Deep blue also includes helicopters, with three Leonardo AW109SPs to be delivered to NIMASA. The aircraft, which have been spotted being test flown in Italy, are painted in a white and green colour scheme. They are to be flown by the NN and will likely be operated both from land bases and ships. Their duties should include surveillance, transport and liaisons.

These new aircraft should provide an unprecedented boost to the Nigerian maritime surveillance capabilities, although the integration and full operationalization of these different assets is likely to take time and will be dependent on the completion of the necessary training and infrastructure work. ■



CAVERTON HELICOPTERS LANDS AIR FORCE DEAL

The Nigerian Air Force has announced that it is going to partner with Caverton Helicopters for the maintenance of rotary-wing aircraft, as well as training of air crews, writes Oscar Nkala.

The new agreement was signed on January 12 during a visit to Caverton's site in Ikeja, Lagos, by the then Nigerian Air Force chief of air staff, Air Marshal Sadique Abubakar.

This was one of Abubakar's last official acts before handing over the NAF's reins, a couple of weeks later, to the new chief, Air Vice Marshal Oladayo Amao.

The deal means that Caverton Helicopters will maintain the NAF's fleets, including AW-139, AW-109 Power and Bell 412 helicopters.

Caverton Helicopters will also train NAF pilots, engineers and technicians, in line with the force's push for skills transfer to support internal capacity development.

The first batch of NAF pilots and technicians were due to start training at the new level D simulator last month. Pilots will undergo type-rating, recurrence, as well as search-and-rescue



(SAR) training, among other courses.

NAF director of public relations, Air Vice Marshal Ibinkule Daramola, said the partnership with Caverton would support the development of local content in science, engineering and technology.

"It [the agreement] is imperative, as part of our continued efforts to ensure adequate and increased serviceability of our aircraft to boost the tempo of air operations to tackle insurgency, banditry, and other forms of criminality in the country," he said.

To keep the fleet operational and battle-ready, the NAF needs timely delivery of spare parts and maintenance services at reasonable costs.

Caverton Helicopters said it has a lot to offer to help the air force deliver national security and support development. The NAF is currently stretched with demand for aerial support for military operations against the Islamist Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east, pipeline vandalism in the south-west and armed cattle rustlers in the north-west.

Top-level visit: Air Marshal Sadique Abubakar visits Caverton's MRO facility and aviation training centre in Lagos alongside other senior NAF officers.

PICTURE: CAVERTON HELICOPTERS.

SEVEN KILLED IN NIGERIAN MILITARY CRASH

Seven people died when a Nigerian Air Force (NAF) Beechcraft King Air 350i crashed after taking-off from Abuja on February 21, reports Erwan de Cherisey.

According to the NAF, the aircraft (serial NAF 201) was returning to Abuja International Airport after reporting an engine failure while en route to Minna, Niger State.

Its mission had been to undertake surveillance duties as part of an ongoing effort to rescue school children and teachers abducted from the Government Science College of Kagara earlier in February.

The King Air had a crew of seven. Pictures and footage of the crash site show that the aircraft broke up on impact and that the remains caught fire, with the whole front fuselage section being consumed by flames.

NAF 201 had initially been delivered in 2009 (as 5N-BMP) to the presidential implementation committee on maritime safety and security (PICOMSS), an entity established in 2004, which eventually assumed significant responsibilities in the field of maritime



security and operated its own fleet of surveillance aircraft.

The King Air was used in maritime surveillance duties until 2013, when it was handed over to the NAF as PICOMSS was disbanded.

It was assigned to the then-209 executive airlift group (EAG), later renamed 307 EAG, based at Abuja, where it was joined by three

Laid to rest: The NAF honours the seven personnel who lost their lives in the accident.

PICTURE: NAF.

other King Air 350i aircraft procured by the NAF in 2014.

Although details of the equipment fitted to NAF 201 have not been released, the aircraft featured dorsal antennas, which suggest that it was equipped with an enhanced communication suite, while the payload installed under its fuselage was likely to have been a synthetic aperture radar (SAR).

The presence of advanced surveillance equipment aboard the aircraft is made obvious by the fact that four of the crew members killed in the crash were, according to the NAF, airborne tactical observation system (ATOS) specialists.

NAF 201 was one of several ISR aircraft in service with the NAF, which has sought to widen its capabilities in this field over the past five years, outfitting another King Air (NAF 202), with an electro-optic/infrared (EO/IR) gimbaled payload.

NAF 202 has been frequently deployed under Operation Lafiya Dole, the ongoing campaign against Boko Haram.

Ambitious plans to create an MRO centre of excellence, plus a first for aircraft leasing in Africa, are taking shape in Nigeria. It could be a pivotal moment for aviation in west and central Africa. Chuck Grieve reports.

The aerospace industry in west and central Africa is following with interest the moves in Nigeria to set up an aircraft leasing company and an MRO centre. If successful – and there is every reason to believe it will be – the creation of these new entities could mark the beginning of a new chapter for the whole region.

The Nigerian Government has made no secret of its aim to develop an aviation industry appropriate for the most populous country and largest economy on the continent.

In mid-January, it took a major step forward when the ministry of aviation named consortia headed by AJW Group companies as the preferred bidders for the two projects seen as key elements of the national vision: domestic sources of aircraft and their maintenance.

The consortia pair AJW's aviation and leasing businesses with Nigeria-based Glovesly Pro-Project, an integrated industrial group with interests in aviation.

Maintenance expertise will be provided by an as-yet-unnamed partner after the withdrawal of EgyptAir Maintenance and Engineering (EGME).

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Ian Malin, AJW's chief financial officer, said the UK-based company has been working on the projects for more than two years. Negotiations continue on both but the leasing company, which will be the first established in Africa through a public-private partnership (PPP) with government, is closer to fruition.

The announcement said AJW Leasing demonstrated a "flexible approach [that is] particularly beneficial for small to medium-sized airlines seeking to maintain competitive advantage, manage cash, and strictly control operational costs for maximum profitability."

Malin noted that developing an MRO centre of excellence in Nigeria, likely to be sited at Abuja International Airport, will address a demand for base maintenance in west and central Africa, which is currently underserved. It would simultaneously attract foreign investment and stem the flow of capital from the region.

It is understood the government is looking at establishing an airport free zone, as well as offering land lease relief to support the initiative.

The MRO will be set up as a PPP and

AEROSPACE MAINTAINS AMBITION FOR GROWTH



Great expectations: Nigeria's new MRO centre of excellence is expected to be built at Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Abuja.

PICTURE: KOPEE15, WIKICOMMONS.

developed on the build, operate, transfer (BOT) model. The aim is to have the capability to service wide-body and narrow-body aircraft, including turboprops.

Although AJW doesn't have a heavy or line maintenance background, the group can bring to the region component repair expertise, thanks to Montreal-based AJW Technique, to augment its extensive spare parts supply network.

In addition to a maintenance partner, AJW will be looking for third-party financing for the MRO project to support the costs of building hangars and workshops on a greenfield site at Abuja, and training staff. AJW will act as overall project coordinator.

"The project was mentioned a year ago," said Malin, "but, of course, everything got delayed. We are now moving from the award phase into the detailed negotiation phase in terms of the underlying project paperwork."

He hoped agreements for both projects would be finalised before summer, paving the way for the leasing company to start operations "as soon as possible". For the MRO, the objective is to break ground in mid to late 2022.

"It gives us a beachhead in west Africa with local partners and a local presence. So we're very excited about it," he concluded. ■



Ian Malin: "We are now moving from the award phase into the detailed negotiation phase."

PICTURE: AJW.

AIR PEACE CALLS FOR EMBRAER MRO

Brazilian original equipment manufacturer (OEM) Embraer is under pressure to establish a maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facility in Nigeria to support Air Peace's new fleet of E195-E2 airliners, replacements for its current fleet of ageing Boeing 737s.

Air Peace chairman, Allen Onyema, reportedly made the remark on the arrival in Abuja of the first of the new aircraft at the end of January. The airline has 30 orders, including 13 firm and 17 options; only Lufthansa, with 35, has more.

Congo Airways also has two on order, plus two E190-E2s.

Air Peace's eight Embraer ERJ 145 aircraft are covered by a multi-year pool programme agreement with the OEM for spares and support. ■

■ See Nigearing up! – page 20



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The green shoots of recovery are starting to show through in Nigeria's business aviation sector.

Dave Calderwood reports.



**Ideal building block:
The Embraer Phenom 300.**

PICTURE ANAP JETS.

Annap Jets, founded in 2014 by Nigerian banker and entrepreneur, Atedo Peterside, has adopted Air Maestro management software to run its growing business.

Air Maestro is cloud-based aviation software managing all aspects, including rosters, flight records, incident/accident reports, flight/duty/fatigue limits, audit, recency and check forms. It was created by Avinet and is managed across Africa and the Middle East by Cairn Aviation.

Anap Jets started with a single Embraer Phenom 300, adding another Phenom 300 and a Legacy 600 as it grew.

Business owner, Peterside, believes the Phenom 300's range, of nearly 2,000nm, is ideal for regional flights for a variety of VIP and corporate clients travelling around north-west and central Africa.

Meanwhile, ExecuJet Africa, part of the Luxaviation Group, has restarted aircraft sales and acquisitions following an increase in demand from current clients.



Gavin Kiggen, vice president Africa at ExecuJet, said: "After a challenging 2020, we're very excited to be back in the sales business and able to provide our clients with support and expertise in aircraft sales and acquisitions.

"We had an immediate positive response to our return, and we are already engaged in acquisition conversations with potential new owners from around the world.

"Our experienced team and global footprint mean we have been able to respond to the uptick in enquiries successfully. We can provide our clients

BUSINESS AVIATION BURSTING TO BUBBLE

with the very best inventory and support them from start to finish, whether it be their first aircraft or an upgrade."

ExecuJet's sales team can identify aircraft, offer independent, unbiased assessments and market intelligence, negotiate prices, handle pre-purchase checks, training, ongoing management and charter options.

Kiggen continued: "Our current clients are looking to either upgrade or find a newer type. We are dealing with a broad range of aircraft, from turboprops through to long-haul aircraft, such as the Bombardier Global 6000.

"Some clients need to travel at short notice within their own region, while others are looking for aircraft that will safely take them further afield with their family bubble."

Staying safe during the Covid-19 pandemic is a key issue for business aviation, with many passengers opting for a charter flight – but only if they can be sure of their health.

One solution chosen by Luxaviation is the FlySkills hygiene certification (FHC) programme, which is being implemented across the group's regional operators, as well as its fixed-base operations (FBOs), managed by ExecuJet.

FHC confirms that defined and accredited hygiene standards are being met by FBOs, aircraft owners and operators.

Luxaviation Group's ExecuJet FBOs now certified by FHC include Cape Town, and Lanseria/Johannesburg (South Africa), Melbourne and Sydney (Australia), Bali (Indonesia), Dubai (United Arab Emirates), Barcelona, Gerona, Ibiza and Valencia (Spain), Brussels (Belgium), Istanbul (Turkey) and Zürich (Switzerland).

ExecuJet Africa's state-of-the-art facility in Nigeria is located at Murtala Muhammed International Airport. The FBO offers maintenance, charter, and aircraft management services.



Gavin Kiggen: "After a challenging 2020, we're very excited to be back in the sales business."

PICTURE: EXECUJET AFRICA.

Alongside the FBOs, many of Luxaviation Group's private jet charter operators globally, from Australia to Germany and from the Middle East to France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, are also now certified by the FlySkills hygiene programme. Only certified aircraft, operators and FBOs are listed in the FHC database, available to charter brokers and dispatch departments.

Robert Fisch, co-president, aviation services, Luxaviation Group, said: "As we hope and plan for private jet flight demand to surge again in 2021, we are doing everything we can to guarantee our clients the safest possible travel experience, in the air and across our FBOs."

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Locust fighting force plagued by lack of cash

Increasing concern: With climate change causing more extreme weather patterns, locust outbreaks are on the increase. It is vital to make sure that countries have the right tools, technology and information in place.

PICTURE: FAO, SVEN TORFINN.

A huge crisis is looming in east Africa as vital funding for the aircraft operations tackling huge swarms of locusts is drying up.
Oscar Nkala reports.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) says the 28 aircraft deployed to destroy swarms of locusts in east Africa will be grounded this spring when funding to sustain operations dries up.

In a statement, the FAO said that without the \$33.8 million needed in additional funding for fuel, airtime, and pilot hours, all 28 aircraft will stop patrolling the skies to spot and spray locusts.

The grounding would be a huge setback to fighting and mitigating the impacts of the east African locust problem, which began in January last year and remains a threat to food security in Kenya, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Tanzania.

FAO deputy director-general, Laurent Thomas, said it would be “tragic” if all the progress made since January 2020 was lost.

“The locust fighting machine that has been assembled in east Africa is now fully equipped and able to contain, suppress, and eventually end this record-breaking upsurge (in locust swarms). Governments have built up capacity in record time. Swarms have been massively reduced in size and number.



“It would be tragic to throw away these achievements just as east African nations are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. There is a real possibility they will bring this upsurge to an end this year, but they need to continue without faltering,” he said.

Since January 2020, the ‘locust air force’ has cleared birds from dangerous sites and treated more than 1.5 million hectares of land in east Africa and Yemen.

According to FAO estimates, more than 6,000 sorties have been flown to detect and spray infestations. The aircraft have been fitted with digital tools, satellite imaging, and artificial intelligence systems to improve detection and identification of infestations.

The fleet of 28 fixed and rotary-wing aircraft is

supported by 260 ground control units and 3,000 spotters and control operators.

Meanwhile, Chinese automated agricultural drone manufacturer, XAG, is touting its XAG agricultural drone as a much cheaper and cost-effective solution to the locust threat.

XAG Africa representative, Fraser Zhang, said the drone, which is now available in three versions, is a much more economical and effective option when compared to manned aircraft and manual spraying means.



“Drones provide an innovative and cheap solution when compared to expensive, manned, flight operations and the even less effective manual spraying methods,” he said. “Drones can be used to provide ultra-low-volume (ULV) precision spraying of chemicals or biological pesticides to kill locust swarms in areas otherwise inaccessible to ground vehicles and other types of aircraft.”

He said the XAG agricultural drone had the added advantage of night operability that included night vision systems designed to detect, identify, and conduct precision spraying on locust swarms.

“During the day, locust swarms spread and fly over extensive areas and stay mobile. That makes daytime spraying less effective. However, during the night, the locusts sleep in large colonies that can be accurately identified and sprayed,” Zhang said.

The XAG agricultural drone has been successfully tested in day and night operations against locusts in Uganda, Zambia and Tanzania.

In the past few years, it has also been deployed successfully in chemical spraying operations over sugar cane fields in South Africa and for grass seeding operations in areas scorched by the Australian wildfires of 2019.

In December, the company unveiled three advanced models of the XAG, including the XAG P40 and the XAG P80. Both are equipped with the SuperX intelligent control system, which allows for switching between three payloads.

Africa's largest defence contractor, Paramount Group, was flying the flag for the continent's capabilities at the International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX) in Abu Dhabi in February – the first fully physical aerospace and defence show in a year. Alan Peaford was there.

Why 'Africa first' is paramount for Paramount

Paramount Group chairman, Ivor Ichikowitz, was giving short shrift to those questioning the organisation's activity in Africa, rather than capitalising on its international expansion.

"Paramount today truly is a global business but we are very proud of our African roots; we have learned a huge amount from our African partners and our African customers," said Ichikowitz, before adding that the group is working in more than 30 African countries.

"People ask, when are you leaving Africa? Well, we're never leaving Africa because one of the issues that I have on my agenda is to prove that an African organisation can become global, and always keep its African roots.

"So, right now, we're very active in South Africa. We have manufacturing support, maintenance, and other operations right through the continent. We're training Africans from every walk of life in 11 different countries. And we're having a lot of fun doing it.

"The Africans that we're working with are getting huge benefit from it. And the African economies are getting benefit from it, and we're only seeing good stuff.

During the show, Paramount announced a new venture – launching a presence in Tel Aviv in a move designed to strategically expand the company's international footprint.

The company said the move was made against the backdrop of the 2020 Washington DC signing of the Abraham Accords and the subsequent normalising of relations between the Republic of Israel, the Kingdom of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Paramount's latest Mbombe 4 combat vehicle had been acquired by the UAE during 2019. In the same year, the company signed a high-level defence collaboration agreement with Saudi



PICTURE: BILLYPIX

Arabian Military Industries (SAMI). Long-term relations with other countries in the region include Jordan, Oman and Bahrain.

Ichikowitz said that experience from Africa's challenging markets was now proving invaluable.

"What we've learned from African partners is how to produce, or how to create technology that is world-class and make it available affordably," he said.

"Now, in a post-Covid world, affordability and cost of operation is everything. In harsh African conditions,

we've had to produce products that have a very light logistics footprint, and equipment that is cheap to purchase, or low cost to purchase and very cheap to operate. And now the rest of the world is identifying exactly that requirement. And that's what's allowing us to expand into central Asia, into Europe and into the United States."

We are very proud of our African roots; we have learned a huge amount from our African partners and our African customers.

IVOR ICHIKOWITZ

SAFETY THE PRIME CONCERN FOR AVIATION AFRICA



Great location: The Kigali convention centre.

PICTURE: AKGERA AVIATION

The Rwandan Government, RwandAir, Rwanda Civil Aviation Authority and Rwanda Airports Company are working with Times Aerospace Events (TAE) to ensure the 2021 Aviation Africa Summit and Exhibition can go ahead safely, as mass vaccinations begin in the country.

Africa's premier networking and conference event is due to take place in Kigali on July 7-8, having been postponed from its original April date.

"We visited IDEX and saw how the UAE Government reduced the risk to delegates and it was certainly an example of best practice," said TAE managing director, Mark Brown.

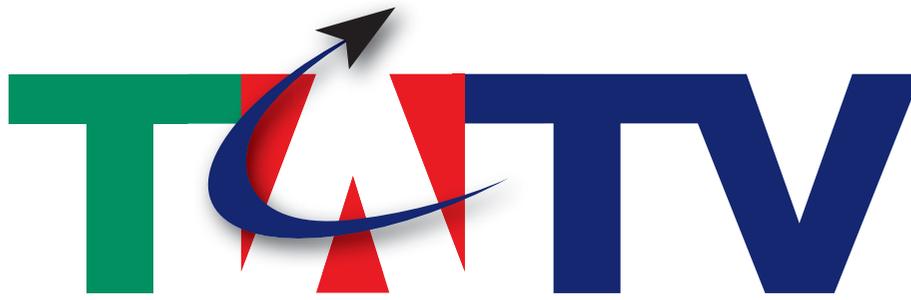
The African show – now in its sixth edition – was the last live aerospace event to run in 2020 as the Covid pandemic and lockdown approached. Held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the show was a great success.

Many major companies, such as Airbus, Embraer, and Qatar Airways, have committed to the 2021 show, providing it is safe.

"We are working closely with Rwanda and the protocols are being planned now. We have been getting great support from the exhibitors and will be monitoring the situation. If it is safe, we are going ahead," Brown said.

The summit will also see airline leaders, regulators, and industry professionals taking to the stage to lead debate on subjects including rebuilding operations; solving the challenges of start-ups; future flight and Africa's opportunities; aviation services for Africa, imported or home grown.

■ Details on the event can be found at: www.aviationafrica.aero



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Tanzania's capital is in line for a new airport that will dramatically improve the city's connectivity. Alan Dron reports.

Operating beyond capacity: Dodoma Airport, currently serving the capital, has no room to expand.

PICTURE: TANZANIA AIRPORTS AUTHORITY.



Dodoma, Tanzania's capital, is due to receive a major boost to its transport links with the construction of a new airport.

A small regional airport already exists but is not big enough for future needs. It is already operating above its operational capacity (it handled around 100,000 passengers in 2019-20) and is close to the city centre, making expansion difficult.

The new airport is to be built at Msalato, some 14km north of the city centre. As well as serving the capital's population, it is located close to several national parks and game reserves, making it attractive for tourists.

At present, visitors heading for these attractions have to land at Dar es Salaam, around 300km away, and transfer by internal

CAPITAL INVESTMENT BOOSTS DODOMA LINKS

flight or road. Travelling by car or coach typically takes around eight hours.

Work on the new airport is scheduled to start after the current financial year, according to the Tanzania Airports Authority, with the first phase taking two years.

This will see the construction of a single runway 3,600m long x 60m wide, which will later be extended to 4,500m in length. A terminal, apron, taxiways, air traffic control tower, and airport infrastructure will complete the first phase.

This will cost an estimated \$330 million, funded primarily by the African Development

Bank (AFDB) – \$272 million – with the Tanzanian Government contributing the rest.

A second phase will see construction of a second, parallel (09/27) 4,500m x 60m runway, with both main landing strips having an adjacent 3600m x 45m secondary runway.

The AFDB said in late February that the new airport, which will have an annual capacity of more than 1.5 million passengers, will meet the city's anticipated increase in connectivity and access needs in the medium-to-long term.

It added that lack of international air traffic connectivity to the region, due to the current limiting airport infrastructure, is inhibiting market, business and industrial development, and the accompanying growth of employment. The new airport is intended to be an economic growth enabler. ■

GHANA ON THE RUNWAY TO RECOVERY

Ghana Airports Company Ltd (GACL) has set forth a recovery plan and created new health measures in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Anuradha Deenapanray Chappard reports.

With government support, GACL has launched measures to improve the vital liquidity situation at Kotoka International Airport (KIA) in its capital city, Accra.

In addition to renegotiating service contracts, it has also taken steps to increase non-aeronautical revenue streams, such as the implementation of the airport city project in Accra and other regional airports.

"Our number one priority during the restart of operations here at KIA was the safety of our staff, passengers and other stakeholders," said a GACL spokesperson.

"Aviation is an adaptive industry and with the virus came new measures. These included thermal checks, a negative polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test pre-arrival and an antigen test upon arrival."



Top connection: KIA aims to be the aviation hub for west Africa. PICTURE: GACL

GACL also designed and implemented a document on Covid-19 protocols. By prioritising health and safety in a measurable and established manner, KIA was one of the first facilities in Africa to be awarded an Airports Council International airport health accreditation.

"KIA was also one of the first on the continent to introduce an innovative and state-of-the-art Covid-19 testing facility integrated into the arrival facilitation process," added the spokesperson.

Beyond the health and economic crisis management, GACL remains focused on its vision to

position Ghana as the preferred aviation hub and leader in airport business in west Africa.

"We aim to be a hub, connecting passengers within this region and beyond with the rest of the world by providing a seamless, safe, and comfortable environment for all stakeholders using the airport, while following strict health and safety measures," said the spokesperson.

"The facilities at KIA set out a benchmark, which other airports within the continent should emulate to reassure passengers who use their facilities." ■

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Hassan El-Houry, head of Kuwait-based National Aviation Services (NAS), wants to make up for lost time and resume the growth story of this privately owned airport services group. Mark Pilling met him.



EL-HOURY: CEO WITH

It was in August last year, four months after the onset of the pandemic, that Hassan El-Houry knew his team's efforts to stabilise NAS were paying off.

The Kuwaiti-based firm, with ground handling and airport service operations across some 50 stations in the Middle East and Africa, had started 2020 phenomenally. "January and February were the best months in the history of NAS. I thought I had a great life," joked El-Houry, the urbane and ambitious group chief executive of NAS.

By the end of March, every NAS airport operation had closed as travel shut down with the rise of the pandemic. The business switched within days into survival mode. The first priority was cash.



"We worked for two months to collect cash owed to us by airlines," said El-Houry. "NAS was really flexible with our customers, treating each one differently and, in some cases, getting our customers on a payment plan. As a privately owned company, we had to be strict. We might waive interest on delayed payments, but the message was clear – don't go quiet on me and we'll remain friends." With most customers it worked.

The NAS management team also moved fast to bring strict cost controls to bear. "I realised very quickly that it was going to be a three-year issue," said El-Houry.

For three months it was 'no mercy' on costs at NAS, with the focus on head office and support functions. "We wanted to retain as much of our operational muscle as possible. We did not close any stations. My eye is on two years' time when there is a recovery. We will grow three times the rate of our competition," said El-Houry.

Did he ever worry that NAS might not make it? "There was a part of me that said: 'This is life and death, it's a major global challenge'. But I think a little bit of insecurity is healthy generally in life."

The cash focus, cost controls, and a workforce slimmed down by around a third, meant NAS was back at break-even by August. The battle to survive was won and the management team turned to 'what next'?

"We asked, how are we going to make up for lost time and what is aviation going to look like?"

The answer lies in a return to adding new airports and concessions to the NAS portfolio, as it has consistently done over the past decade, and in new digital technologies that the company is already pioneering.

NAS is already back to bringing more airports into its network. It has just begun operations in Baghdad, having won the licence to provide exclusive passenger services at the Iraqi capital's international airport.

This year, NAS ground handling operations will also start at airports in Guinea-Bissau, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. "My goal is to be in all 54 African countries," said El-Houry. These new additions will mean NAS having operations in 15 of them.

The move into Africa began a decade ago. When El-Houry took up the reins at NAS in 2008, the growth focus was India, but it was not a profitable excursion. The company retains a presence in India, but the loss-making stations were closed.

El-Houry's gaze turned west. "Our big bet, ten years ago, was that Africa would be our growth engine. It's our backyard," he said. The thinking was simple; the air travel scene was growing fast, it was a fragmented marketplace, culturally similar to the Middle East, and where business gets done with strong relationships.

The first NAS foray into Africa was Rwanda,

with operations in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Uganda and Mozambique following. "Our big leap forward came in Cote d'Ivoire, where we won in a tender bidding against the French. They didn't think a Kuwaiti company would be a serious competitor," said El-Houry.

"We built good relationships, we did very well in the technical and in the financial propositions," he added.

At a government dinner in Cote d'Ivoire's economic capital, Abidjan, the minister of transport publicly praised NAS for meeting all of its contractual obligations to the letter. "That is something I am very proud of," said El-Houry.

Making a success in countries like Cote d'Ivoire has made people realise that NAS is a "serious player", he added.

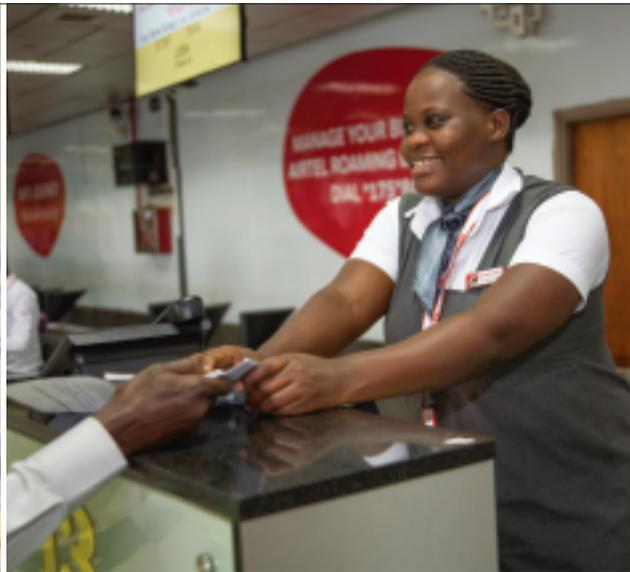
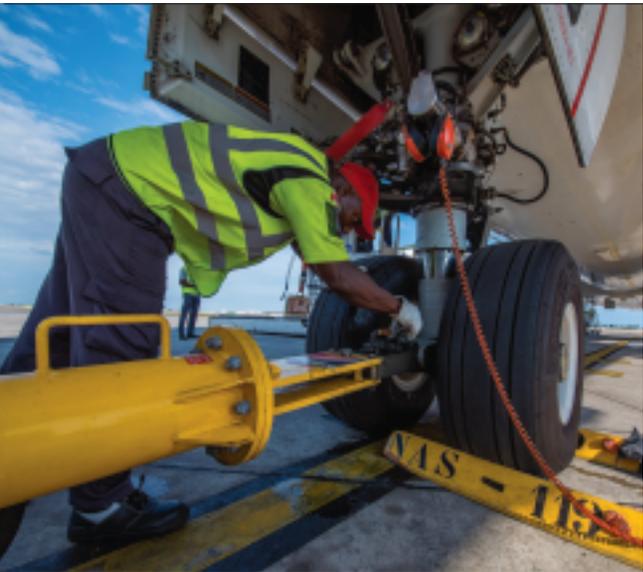


What is the NAS secret in Africa? The recipe is simple but is has not been an overnight success. "We've struggled, we've worked hard, and we've had blood, sweat and tears," said El-Houry. Making strong business bonds face-to-face has been key. "The relationships we have built up pre-Covid have served us very well during the pandemic."

NAS keeps to its promises. "We always comply with the contract, every single term. There are no cutting corners," said El-Houry. "Also, we do not participate in politics at all. You're really a guest in a certain country to serve the people of that country."

For El-Houry, who is Lebanese by birth and brought up from a young age in Kuwait, the responsibility to continue the upward trajectory of NAS drives him on.

The NAS board asked El-Houry, at just 28 years old, to join as CEO. The mission was to



From left: North African jewel: In Marrakech, Morocco, NAS provides the Pearl Assist traveller service.

On the ground: NAS provides ground handling operations at Félix-Houphouët-Boigny International Airport in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.

Spreading out: NAS has operations in 15 African countries, including airport services at Entebbe International Airport in Uganda.

PICTURES: NAS.

A LICENCE TO GROW

“My goal is to be in all 54 African countries.”

HASSAN EL-HOURY



PICTURE: NAS.

turn this small, loss-making, aviation firm around and build a profitable brand that shareholders and employees would be proud of.

El-Houry thought he would be at NAS for three years. The early days were tough. “We weren’t able to invest at our own will. Just buying a bus or a hi-loader was a painstaking process to justify,” he said. But NAS slowly came out of the cycle of constantly needing cash and investment, and became completely self-reliant.

Although NAS does not disclose any financial information, El-Houry said it has pre-tax profit margins higher than 25%, which compares favourably with its competitors. This is achieved with a business culture where “we strive to behave like a start-up; being agile, being

innovative,” he said. “In high growth markets, like MEA, you need quick decision-making.”

El-Houry is careful to keep NAS independent – it is not affiliated with any airline – ensuring all decisions are commercially and operationally driven.

The commercial mindset is increasingly coupled with a technology focus to help set NAS apart, especially with the advent of the pandemic. NAS has worked closely with the Kuwait Ministry of Health, and many national organisations, to develop solutions to digitize health data and facilitate safe travel.

“Three inter-linked solutions paved the way, making Kuwait one of the safest airports in the world,” explained El-Houry.

There is the medical utility network accretor, a patented blockchain technology connecting labs in more than 40 cities (all considered high risk) with direct flights to Kuwait.

Then, KuwaitMosafer is a web platform for passengers traveling through Kuwait International Airport to facilitate quick and contactless travel.

And, finally, there is BelSalamah, a web application that allows migrant workers a safe and direct passage to return to Kuwait. Almost 100,000 people registered less than two weeks after its launch.

□ □ □ □ □

El-Houry is excited that NAS can aid Kuwait’s recovery and that technology is coming to the fore. “Going forward, digital services will play a big part in our business,” he said.

While the NAS focus has been on Africa, the Middle East, south-east Asia and digital developments, El-Houry is alive to acquisition opportunities. “I see a lot of companies that are distressed. We are open to look at any opportunity, but we are particularly interested in companies in emerging markets. And many companies are turning to us now because we are seen as good partners,” he said.

It is a testament to the progress of NAS that he believes it can be, and is seen as, a player at the global level. “We are serious investors, with professional management,” he said.

Turning NAS into a profitable, expansive, company that continues to deliver value to its stakeholders has kept El-Houry fixated on his task for more than a decade. Work to get over the impact of the pandemic is well under way and now it is all about looking forward.

“What I’m focused on is the recovery,” said El-Houry. “I want to make up for lost time.” ■

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AFRICAN Digest

ACIA Aero Leasing Group CEO, Mick Mooney, believes that now is the perfect time for airlines across the continent to grasp the opportunities presenting themselves in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Vincent Chappard reports.

Leasing has 'enormous growth potential' in Africa

Africa-based operators have been at the heart of ACIA's activities since its inception around two decades ago. Its aircraft operate in South Africa, Algeria, Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique and Tanzania. To service these operations, the company has offices in Mauritius and South Africa.

It recently completed deals for four aircraft to Sahel Aviation Service in Mali, one ATR cargo aircraft for Johannesburg's Solenta Aviation, and two aircraft for Air Express Algeria.

Mooney said: "This region presents significant opportunities and these will be greater, post-pandemic. As many of our operators in Africa run domestic flights, its impact has been felt less when compared to others relying on cross-border travel to support their business models."

According to Mooney, operators like Ethiopian Airlines have demonstrated what is possible in Africa. And for other countries to follow suit, he says, national and regional governments must provide airlines – and not just national companies – with financial and regulatory support, while facilitating experienced management teams, but without exercising control.

Mooney said ACIA's strategy differs from some aircraft leasing companies because of its internal capability to own and manage commercial aircraft throughout the process. "In addition to acquiring new, or near-new, aircraft for



lease, we have a very efficient conversion business (IPR Conversions) that enables us to take mid-life and ageing ATR aircraft and convert them for freight," he explained. "This can extend the life of an aircraft by 10 to 15 years."

Mooney believes that commercial aircraft leasing companies will play a larger role in airline funding and liquidity over the coming years.

With freight aircraft forming a growing percentage of the company's portfolio, he said the exponential growth of e-commerce was "very encouraging".

He concluded: "So, basically we are very optimistic for the long-term future of the industry and especially for the niche segment that we support. We believe that 2021 will turn out to be a year of strong growth for ACIA." ■

Opportunity to build the fleet: Commercial aircraft leasing companies will play a larger role in airline funding and liquidity over the coming years.

PICTURE: ACIA AERO LEASING.

SOMMAIRE

LES POTENTIELS DU LEASING EN AFRIQUE

Le DG d'ACIA Aero Leasing Group, Mick Mooney, a déclaré à Vincent Chappard qu'il était temps pour les compagnies aériennes de capitaliser sur les opportunités qui se présenteront à la suite de la pandémie du Covid-19.

ACIA Aero Leasing a récemment finalisé plusieurs opérations en Afrique avec notamment quatre avions vers Sahel Aviation Service au Mali, un ATR cargo pour Solenta Aviation et deux avions à Air Express Algeria.

Les opérateurs basés en Afrique sont au cœur des activités de la société depuis sa création il y a environ 20 ans. Ses avions opèrent en Afrique du Sud, en Algérie, en Angola, en Côte d'Ivoire, au Gabon, au Kenya, au Mali, au Mozambique et en Tanzanie. Elle dispose également de deux bureaux en Afrique (à Maurice et en Afrique du Sud).

« Cette région présente des opportunités significatives et il y aura davantage de développement après la pandémie du Covid-19. Comme beaucoup de nos opérateurs en Afrique font des vols domestiques, son impact a été moindre comparé aux opérateurs dépendant des voyages

transfrontaliers pour soutenir leur modèle commercial », affirme Mick Mooney.

Selon lui, des opérateurs comme Ethiopian Airlines ont démontré ce qui est possible en Afrique.

« Pour que d'autres pays emboîtent le pas, les gouvernements locaux doivent apporter aux compagnies aériennes (et pas seulement aux compagnies nationales) leur soutien financier et réglementaire, et à des équipes expérimentées sans nécessairement exercer un contrôle sur leur gestion ».

Mick Mooney explique que la stratégie d'ACIA diffère de celle de certains bailleurs en raison de ses capacités internes à posséder et à gérer des avions sur tout le process. « En plus d'acquérir des avions neufs ou quasi neufs à louer, nous avons une activité de conversion très efficace (IPR Conversions) qui nous permet de prendre des avions ATR à mi-vie et

vieillissants pour les convertir à des fins de fret. Cela peut prolonger la durée de vie d'un avion de 10 à 15 ans », souligne Mick Mooney.

Les avions cargo constituent une part grandissante du portefeuille de la société et la croissance exponentielle du commerce électronique est très encourageante.

« Nous sommes très optimistes pour l'avenir à long terme de l'industrie et particulièrement pour le segment de niche que nous soutenons. 2021 sera une année de forte croissance pour ACIA car nous ajoutons des actifs à notre portefeuille et nous en visons d'autres. »

Mick Mooney estime que les bailleurs joueront un rôle plus important dans le financement et la liquidité des compagnies aériennes au cours des deux à trois prochaines années. ■

TUNISIA BEAMING WITH BOOSTED RADAR COVERAGE

The installation of a new monopulse secondary surveillance radar (MSSR) at Akouada, near Sousse, represents a significant enhancement of radar coverage over and around Tunisia.

Alan Dron reports.

The new radar system, produced by Spanish company, Indra, implements many improvements when compared to the previous system, including a Mode S surveillance capability that allows air traffic controllers to have a more precise overview.

Mode S allows a radar system to interrogate one aircraft at a time if several are simultaneously within the radar beam. It also gives greater directional accuracy.

The new MSSR allows each aircraft to be unambiguously and automatically identified and also provides more accurate altitude and positioning information.

These improvements allow an increase in the number of aircraft and the frequency of operations in a given area, allowing the distance between flights to be decreased, while maintaining safety levels.

The system has a range of 250 nautical miles (460km), providing coverage over almost all of Tunisia at high level, and out as far as Malta.



Continuous improvement: Indra has been a long-time supplier of air traffic control equipment to Tunisia, such as this radar installation at Sidi Zid. PICTURE: INDRA.

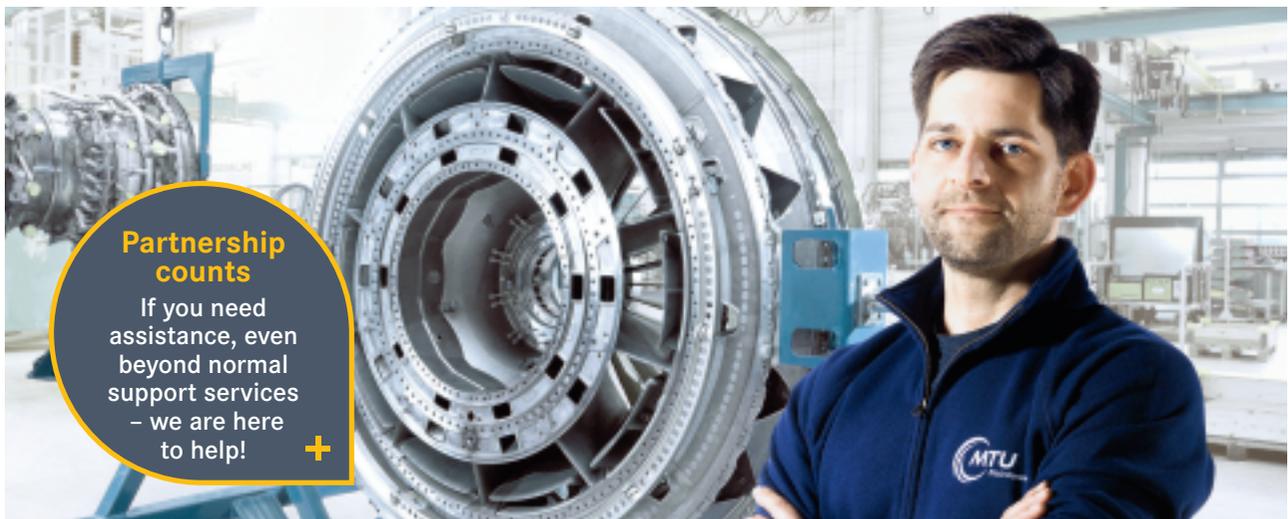
The new radar can be used as a back-up for radar systems located at Tunis Airport and on Djerba Island, as well as for approaches to Sousse Airport.

It is planned to have the system fully operational and integrated into the country's air traffic control system by June 2021.

The new radar at Akouada is the latest project that Indra has provided for Tunisia's Civil Aviation and Airports Authority (OACA), having worked with OACA for the past decade. Tunisia's air traffic management capacity and safety statistics are now some of the most advanced in Africa, according to Indra.

Among the projects implemented by Indra in Tunisia in past years are:

- Control centres (en-route or approach) at Djerba, Monastir, Enfidha and Tunis;
- Instrument landing systems and navigation aids for Djerba, Monastir, Enfidha, Tunis, Sidi Ali Ben Aoun, and Gafsa;
- Voice communication systems at several locations; and
- Radars (primary, secondary or both) at Tunis Carthage International Airport, Sidi Zid, and Bor Jelij.



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Ethiopian Airlines Catering (ET Catering) is working on a growth plan to transform it into the biggest catering centre in Africa and one of the best in-flight service providers in the region. But first, it is taking the local approach. Kaleyesus Bekele reports.

ETHIOPIAN BACKS HOME-GROWN MARKET TO BEAR FRUIT...

Established in the 1960s at Ethiopian Airlines' Addis Ababa Bole International Airport hub, ET Catering currently has the capacity to produce 100,000 meals per day.

In 2016, the airline spent more than \$20 million to expand the catering facility by building new kitchens, sourcing catering trucks, and hiring more professional staff.

Today, the centre boasts more than 1,000 staff.

Now, in an effort to serve its customers healthy food and beverages and also boost the local economy, ET Catering is eyeing indigenous organic foods.

At the launch of a new 'Fly Ethiopian Go Green' campaign, at the Ethiopian Skylight Hotel in Addis Ababa on February 13, Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO, Tewolde GebreMariam, said: "We are now focusing on indigenous fresh produce. The new go green campaign has two objectives – to serve fresh and healthy foods; and to encourage local producers and create local employment."

He revealed: "We have already started working with farmers' cooperatives and the US development agency, USAID, in building the capacity of local producers."

The aid agency has recently signed an agreement with Ethiopian Airlines that enables it to provide technical and financial assistance to local producers. It has allocated \$2 million to assist fruit and vegetable producers and poultry farms and meat suppliers. The agency has promised to provide additional funding in the second phase of the project.



ET Catering managing director, Belayneh Asfaw, said nature had endowed Ethiopia with beautiful weather suitable for horticulture farming. "We grow the best quality flowers; we grow tropical fruits, vegetables and herbs in the Rift Valley. Ethiopia is the origin of coffee. We have the finest organic coffee. We also have natural honey."

According to Asfaw, ET Catering wants to promote Ethiopian national dishes on its flights. "We are working from farm to fork on the whole supply chain. We have a list of varieties of Ethiopian organic products that we can serve on board. In that way, we can create a market for local products, as well as local employment."

Ethiopian Catering makes annual purchases worth \$100 million but, currently, only around 10% of that is locally sourced. "We want to boost local purchase to 25%; we want to contribute our share for the country's economic growth," Asfaw added.

Before the 2016 expansion, the catering centre used to have a daily production capacity of 30,000 meals. Although it can now produce more than three times that amount, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic means that it is currently reduced to around 20,000 meals.



Healthy options: Ethiopia has the perfect climate to produce fantastic food.

PICTURES: ET CATERING.



We want to boost local purchase to 25%.

BELAYNEH ASFAW

In addition to supplying food and beverages to Ethiopian Airlines, the catering centre also provides for VIP and charter flights, which often shuttle to and from Addis Ababa.

"At the moment, we are not serving other airlines that operate scheduled flights to Addis Ababa," said Asfaw. "Due to Covid-19, airlines are bringing in food and beverages from their home base. However, we are now holding discussions with airlines such as Emirates and Qatar Airways."

There are 13 international airlines, including Emirates, Qatar, Kenya Airways, Lufthansa, Turkish and EgyptAir, that fly to Addis Ababa.

With the existing kitchen capacity, the professional chefs produce different international dishes, including a varied range of international cuisines, such as Chinese, Indian, Ottoman, and Italian. They cook Ethiopian national dishes and a wide range of bakery products, desserts, and celebratory cakes.

For Muslims, ET Catering has a separate accredited Halal kitchen with designated chef, which has special recognition by Haj and Umrah passengers.

In the Ethiopian Airlines 15-year growth strategy, ET Catering plans to generate \$14.4 million annual revenue by 2035.

The future of aviation in Africa is bright, according to Andrew Lucas, president and CEO of FlightPath International. Marcelle Nethersole finds out more.

Class act at the heart of Africa

FlightPath International may be a Canadian company but, as Andrew Lucas, president and CEO, put it: “Our heart is in Africa.”

The multi-national flight operations support company started life 18 years ago providing training for pilots, engineers, flight attendants, and dispatchers.

“We began in 2003 and our first customer was Trident Aviation in Nairobi; our second was Petroleum Air Services (PAS), based in Cairo,” said Lucas. “Since then we have delivered training services in countries including South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, the Ivory Coast, Chad, Nigeria, Angola, Gabon, Togo, Mozambique, Sudan, the DRC, Libya, and Egypt. We train for more than a dozen operators in Kenya alone.”

The company has also been working with Ethiopian Airlines for more than 12 years after developing and delivering the multi-crew pilot licence (MPL) programme to the airline.



FlightPath’s training centres are located globally. However, the majority of its training is conducted at its clients’ facilities.

“We deploy our instructors and other personnel to the airline, or operator, to deliver support services on site, which saves a tremendous amount of money for our clients,” said Lucas. “Our focus has always been to help airlines incorporate cutting-edge training programmes into their operation. When feasible, we assist them in moving toward self-sufficiency – again cutting costs.”

The company provides training and operational support for all major fleet types globally including Boeing, Airbus, Bombardier, Embraer, and De Havilland.

Lucas, who has worked more than 25 years in the airline training industry, said for a company, such as FlightPath, to



Andrew Lucas: “We do not arrive at someone’s facility and presume to have all the answers.”

Top: FlightPath offers professional training facilities.

PICTURES: FLIGHTPATH INTERNATIONAL.

be successful it must be aware of the many cultural differences throughout Africa, as well as globally.

“We believe we bring the highest standard of training and support services to the operators within Africa,” said Lucas. “We are sensitive to the financial constraints of both first-tier and developing countries.”

“We do not arrive at someone’s facility and presume to have all the answers. Rather, we listen to the operator and come to a point of understanding their challenges. We then work hand-in-hand within their operation to help them solve systemic problems, rather than merely ticking off a block of specific training they require.”

Lucas believes the Covid-19 pandemic will hit Africa hard. “It will result in some operators ceasing operations, while others may flourish. We have also seen new start-up operators emerging,” he said.

Lucas said the pandemic hadn’t affected the company’s commitment to its African operators, pointing out that it had delivered training and support services on-site in Ethiopia and Angola during the crisis.

“We have continued to deliver distance learning via WebEx and Microsoft Teams with our live instructor-led training,” said Lucas. “This programme has enabled our African operators to continue with their training, even during lockdowns.”

The company is currently opening a new training centre in Malta, which will serve north Africa, as well as the Middle East and Europe. It is also in discussions for centres in several other African countries for 2021/2022. ■



Thumbs up: EgyptAir Training Academy’s A320neo simulator is set for action.

PICTURE: EGYPTAIR.

NORTH AFRICAN TRAINING BOOST

Airline pilots have been severely hit by the Covid-19 crisis, which has entailed massive job cuts and deprived them from flying. Now north Africa initiatives have been launched to support aviation training, writes Vincent Chappard.

Morocco and Egypt are leading the way.

Moroccan authorities have approved a draft decree on the reorganisation of the Royal Air School. It aims at enabling air transport companies to benefit from the expertise of the Royal Armed Forces in aeronautical training and allowing the Royal Air School to train airline pilots, within a contractual framework between the National Defense Administration and the national air transport companies.

This decision was taken following the bailout of Royal Air Maroc and the conflict between RAM and the Moroccan Airline Pilots Association (AMPL), which manages the training process of national airline pilots.

Meanwhile, the EgyptAir Training Academy has had its A320neo flight simulator certified by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

Furthermore, an Airbus A220-300 simulator was due to go into service in February. According to the academy, these simulators will provide high-level training with new technological support to attract new customers, backing up EgyptAir’s strategy to expand its services by targeting pilots from Africa/MENA, Europe, and Indian airlines. ■

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Keith Mwanalushi speaks to Gabriel Lesa, director general at Zambia's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), about the country's aviation sector and the work going on behind the scenes to support the growth trajectories expected after Covid-19.

Clearing Zambia for take-off

Zambian aviation has moved forward considerably since 2009, when the country and its airlines were placed on the European Union air safety list – with carriers banned from the European Union.

Back then, a total of 98 findings were recorded against Zambia, together with significant safety concerns.

“As the CAA, we had to come up first and foremost with the national safety plan, which we shared with the European Union (EU) in Brussels. That plan was for Zambia to really start implementing the eight critical elements of sector oversight,” recalled director general, Gabriel Lesa.

It took seven years for Zambia to be removed from the list. During that time,

Gabriel Lesa: “Despite the current situation, it is an exciting time.”

PICTURE: ZAMBIA CAA.



the CAA was active in enabling legislation changes that would become part of the legal framework to domesticate most of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards.

Technical training was also required to ensure that all the CAA's inspectors met the international standard. “We very quickly created a technical library, and ensured that it was properly resourced. After that, we looked at other areas to actually start carrying out certification, approval, and licencing duties,” said Lesa.

By 2016, Zambia had largely resolved the root causes of the problems. Following extensive inspections by the ICAO and the EU, and 16 days after a meeting in the European Parliament to present its case, Zambia was removed from the EU naughty list.

Even though no Zambian carriers presently fly into the EU, being placed on its safety list had far-reaching consequences, with the work conducted to raise standards now becoming critical for opening up air service opportunities in the Covid pandemic recovery period.

“Currently, in terms of safety in the region, especially here in Zambia, we have significantly improved,” said Lesa. “If you go to the ICAO online framework, and you check on Zambia, you will see that, in terms of the effort, Zambia is literally at 100% in all the fields. And, in terms of the corrective action plans, again, we have made significant strides.”

As recently as November, the



Zambian Government was discussing in parliament the ratification of the African Union's single African air transport market (SAATM) project, which aims to create a single unified air transport market in Africa.

Lesa said the Zambian parliament has now ratified not only the Yamoussoukro Decision, the treaty that allowed for open skies among most African countries, which is a prerequisite to join the SAATM, but also other conventions, such as the Cape Town Convention, which would make it easier for Zambian airlines to acquire aircraft.

In addition, Zambia has also ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). “Inter-African trade can really push the economies of African states and the easiest mode of transport for this trade to grow is aviation,” said Lesa. “By ratifying these initiatives, after Covid, the potential could be realised. Despite the current situation, it is an exciting time.”



Clearly, Covid has devastated the aviation industry globally and, in smaller aviation markets like Zambia, with just a handful of operators, it's evident that regional carriers are usually the most exposed in times of crisis, especially in terms of financial liquidity.

Currently, the key players in the market are Proflight Zambia, Mahogany Air, and Zambia Royal Airlines, operating domestically and to a few regional routes, predominately to South Africa.

“Indeed, Covid has dealt a very heavy blow to aviation and tourism, and these two sectors basically support each other,” said Lesa. “We've seen a scaling down but we still have some airline activities going on, even though the Covid situation could be much better than it is.”

The Covid recovery rate in Zambia is about



Improved infrastructure: New airport developments, including KKIA in Lusaka, are nearing completion.

PICTURE: ZAFL

Below: The CAA implemented the eight critical elements of sector oversight.

PICTURE: PROFLIGHT ZAMBIA.



92% and, coupled with the ongoing global vaccination programme, Lesa is optimistic. “We do believe that, as the pandemic starts receding in many parts of the world, it will eventually positively affect Zambia too. And, of course, we might start our vaccine regime very soon as well.”

The most widely discussed topic in the country is the establishment of the much-anticipated new Zambia Airways, to operate as the flag-carrier.

The new airline is a joint venture between Zambia’s state-owned Industrial Development Corporation and Ethiopian Airlines (ET). The project has been delayed by several years and Lesa acknowledged that the pandemic had pushed that deferment even further.

He said that certification for the airline’s air operator’s certificate (AOC) took longer than expected because the CAA had to ensure that the carrier was properly guided in meeting all international standards. “It took almost two years but, by the time we actually issued the certificate, we were very satisfied that the airline was ready,” he said.

However, just as Zambia Airways was granted foreign air operator permits by neighbouring countries, Covid struck. Lesa believes the airline will announce a start update as soon as Covid numbers go down.

There has been cautious optimism, but also some anxieties, about the new airline from the wider aviation community in Zambia.

Some are concerned about the direct connection between the demand for air travel and the performance of the local economy.

Also, worries have erupted over potentially limiting the new airline to being a small feeder carrier for shareholder Ethiopian, pointing to ET’s other ventures, such as Malawi Airlines and Asky, which are arguably limited as regional operators.

Lesa accepts that, while some of the concerns are understandable, they are not grounded in fact. He said Zambia Airways is an independent airline, with Ethiopian playing its shareholder role.

“As a regulator, we know the airline plans. That is to start domestic first and build up the passenger base, together with the regional routes. And, once the passenger base has grown, they indicated they want to start international routes and we know some of those destinations. So, the concerns and worries that it will be a feeder airline for Ethiopian, I think are not well grounded.”

Lesa continued: “Ethiopian is a world-renowned carrier, and I’m sure the lessons and the benefits they’ll bring to this young airline will

be in the boardroom – I believe that is where they are going to be effective.

“I do not see it as a restriction. In fact, Zambia Airways, as an airline, is going to be a competitor to Ethiopian Airlines.”

Several airport upgrade projects around the country are nearing completion, although some opening dates have been pushed back because of the pandemic.

Lesa said the infrastructure improvements are long overdue, pointing to the new Simon Mwansa Kapwepwe International Airport in Ndola as a world-class facility. “It’s almost done; when you go there you feel proud,” he said.



He added that the Zambian Government had prioritised infrastructure development because of the potential growth of aviation. He explained that, when the International Air Transport Association (IATA) had made a site visit in 2018 and seen the sector growth pattern, the trajectory was showing that air traffic in Zambia was increasing at 13% year-on-year.

“We are thinking, the numbers are going to flip and double somewhere around 2025, and then again, double in 2030,” he explained.

“When you look at the infrastructure that we had, and if you are going to have the potential of passengers growing like that, you’re going to be constrained unless you do something about it.”

The new passenger terminal at Kenneth Kaunda International Airport in the capital, Lusaka, is also expected to open this year. Other improvements to the facility include a new instrument landing system (ILS), and new air navigation systems.

“We just hope the trajectories are going to rebound after the pandemic to the pre-Covid numbers,” concluded Lesa.



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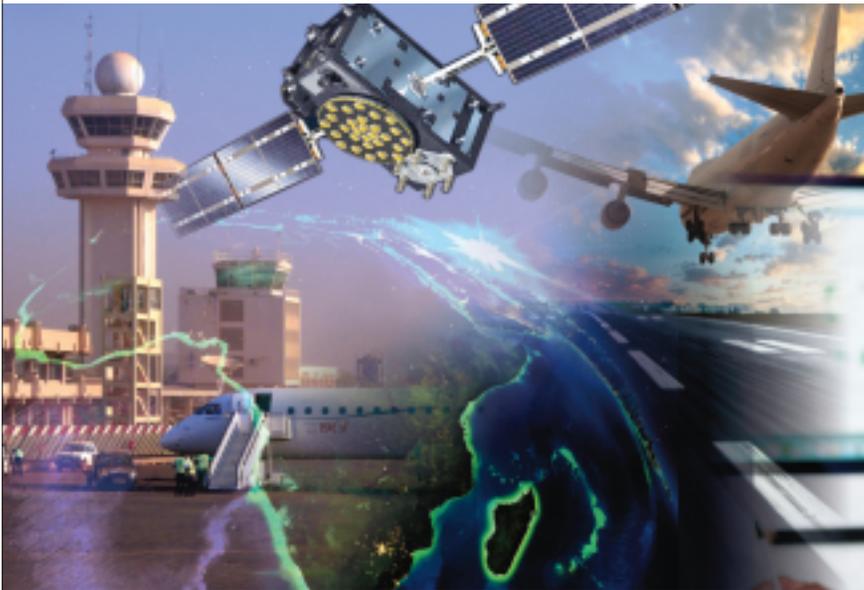
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Five flight demonstrations of a satellite-based augmentation system (SBAS) have been performed at Lomé International Airport in Togo. Steve Nichols reports.

TOGO BOLDLY GOES...



On target: The SBAS system allows the user much greater accuracy – to a metre-level for the aviation industry.

PICTURE: THALES ALENIA SPACE.

SBAS is a highly-accurate and reliable navigation satellite system that augments or aids other global navigation satellite systems (GNSS) like GPS or Galileo. The SBAS signal has been in place over the Africa and Indian Ocean (AFI) flight region since September 2020, using the Nigerian NIGCOMSAT-1R satellite.

The demonstration flights in Togo were the result of a joint project to accelerate SBAS development for aviation in Africa between the Agency for Air Navigation Safety in Africa and Madagascar (ASECNA), the NIGCOMSAT satellite, and Thales Alenia Space – a joint venture between Thales and Leonardo.



Current GNSS systems give users an accuracy of between five and 15 metres. However, SBAS and precise point positioning (PPP) systems, provide correction, allowing the user much greater accuracy – to a metre-level for the aviation industry and decimetre (10 to 15cm) for other sectors like agriculture, construction, mining, freight, and, critically, defence and national security.

Basic positioning systems require a ground-based receiver, for example in a mobile phone, to receive signals simultaneously from a number of positioning satellites.

These signals are triangulated using the slight differences in their arrival time, which allows the receiver to calculate its position to within a few metres. SBAS augments and upgrades the performance of this process by correcting some of the variations, such as how the ionosphere may affect signal propagation, substantially increasing the accuracy of the receiver's position.

The demonstration goal was to show the efficiency of the technology developed as part of the 'SBAS for Africa and Indian Ocean' programme, which aims to augment the performances of the GPS and Galileo satellite navigation constellations.

The tests were carried out using an ASECNA calibration ATR-42-300 turboprop regional airliner, which had been equipped by Pildo Labs.

The aim of the experiment was to demonstrate the ability of the system to allow landings on the two ends of the runway without the use of any local ground infrastructure, and with a performance level close to the use of instrument landing systems (ILS).

It demonstrated the benefits of the future safety-of-life SBAS services, which are expected to be introduced from 2024, in terms of flight safety, efficiency, and environmental protection.

Dr Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami, Nigeria's minister of communications and digital economy, said the SBAS flight was of interest, not only in the telecommunications sector, but also for "aviation, maritime, rail transport, precision agriculture, survey, oil and gas, and mass-market applications for sustainable development beyond Nigerian shores".



Benoit Broudy, vice president navigation business at Thales Alenia Space, said: "Our long-standing expertise, acquired with the development of the European geostationary navigation overlay service (EGNOS) SBAS and the Korea augmentation satellite system (KASS) SBAS, combined with our new leading-edge satellite positioning technologies, makes Thales Alenia Space the ideal partner to best support countries to implement their own SBAS efficiently.

"We hope this series of demonstrations will help to accelerate SBAS adoption in aviation in Africa."

Mohamed Moussa, director general of ASECNA, added: "I'm proud to have demonstrated the utility and efficiency of the SBAS services in the continent.

"The provision of the first African SBAS early service is a crucial major step forward in the development of satellite navigation in the AFI region, and in the deployment of the SBAS for Africa and Indian Ocean' system, the navigation solution for Africa by Africa.

"It demonstrates the ambition and commitment of ASECNA to enhance air navigation safety for the benefit of the whole continent, in line with my vision for the unification of the African sky."

NIGCOMSAT 1R was launched in 2011 after the failure of NIGCOMSAT 1. The original satellite failed in November 2008 because of a technical error in its northern solar array. It was sent to a 'graveyard orbit' when it became apparent that the satellite could not be recovered. ■

Alexandra Guillot

Marcelle Nethersole *speaks to the CEO of Hi-Fly Marketing.*

1

■ What does Hi-Fly Marketing do?

Hi-Fly Marketing was established in 2008 and is based in Cape Town, South Africa, from where it provides consultancy services throughout Africa's aviation industry.

It is a fast-paced, internationally recognised organisation with a start-up culture. We are well known for thinking outside the box and making an impact on the African aviation community.

We work on a limited number of projects at the same time to give our clients our full attention.

We believe the ability to learn, listen, be proactive, communicate, and engage with clients is the key to our success.

2

■ Can you give me examples of your technology systems?

We have worked with leading companies specialising in aircraft technical services and dedicated IT services like Safran Electronics and Defence, ADSoftware, and Sabena Technics.

We have a long experience in flight data monitoring, MRO software, and flight scheduling and crew management.

We offer technology systems consulting, from identifying the needs, evaluating the different options available on the market, to managing the implementation project.

3

■ Can you tell me about your customers throughout Africa?

Over the years, we have worked with more than 50 customers on the continent, ranging from airlines to helicopter operators, charters, and leasing companies.

Our main focus has always been on sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian Ocean, and clients have included Air Austral, Air Botswana, Global Aviation, Air Cote d'Ivoire, Air Tanzania, African World Airlines, Ethiopian Airlines, Heli Malongo, Air Mauritius, and South African Airways.

4

■ You recently launched 'Hi-Fly Talent & Resourcing'. Can you tell me about it?

This was done in early 2021. It is something that has been in my mind for a while because, as a business owner, I have faced great difficulties recruiting staff with experience in the aviation industry and no recruitment agency could really assist, as they had little knowledge of our industry and no international connections.

I really wanted to find a solution to connect talented people with my counterparts, who were looking for specific profiles.

I have also realised that, because our industry has been relying on word-of-mouth for so long, assistance is required to prepare candidates to promote themselves and to optimise their CVs, as much as companies need to better clarify their requirements in terms of hard and soft skills.

5

■ How do you find the right candidates for the agency?

Our industry goes across borders and, with Covid-19, I think we can now tap into a pool of talent that was never really accessible before.

We find candidates primarily via our network; we want to make sure the talented people we propose to clients have excellent references from people we trust. We remain open, though, to candidates who spontaneously contact us and we run them through our selection process.

6

■ How do you see the aviation industry in Africa in the next few years?

Some of us will not make it. We saw what just happened to Air Namibia. However, I am quite positive that Africa will recover faster than other markets.

Compared to other parts of the world, where roads and railway networks offer an alternative, air transport in Africa is often the only way to travel a distance.

Interesting new projects are already starting with the likes of LIFT Airline and Air Cote d'Ivoire.

7

■ What does a typical day hold for you?

I wake at 6am and go for an hour's exercise to recharge my batteries and get energy for the day.

When you manage a business in the aviation industry, the biggest challenge is to balance time, because our industry never sleeps. I put a lot of effort into organising my days and setting up targets and deadlines. Meetings and admin should be limited, or they may become quite time-consuming.

At the end of each day, I always go through my calendar for the next three days. As a CEO, my job is to stay focused – even during stormy weather.

My personal motto is "never ever give up".



PICTURE: HI-FLY MARKETING

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