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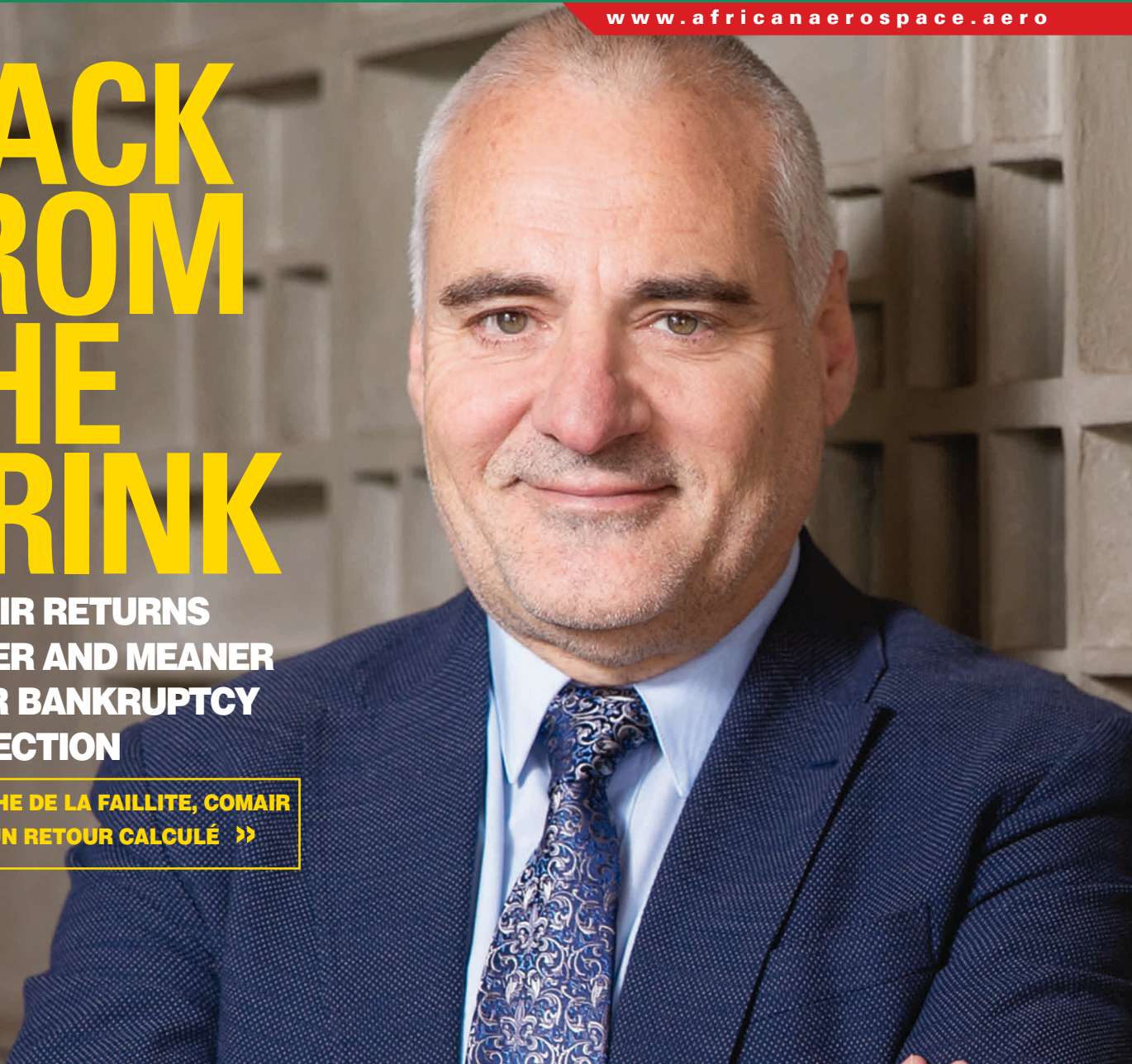
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AFTER BANKRUPTCY
PROTECTION

« PROCHE DE LA FAILLITE, COMAIR
FAIT UN RETOUR CALCULÉ »

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AASA chief
reflects on
20 years of
change

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BUSINESS AVIATION

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DEFENCE

Charge
of the
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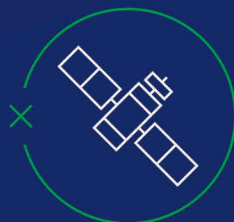
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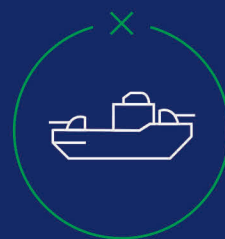
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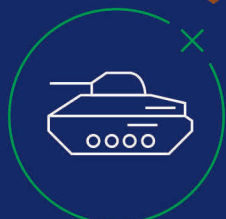
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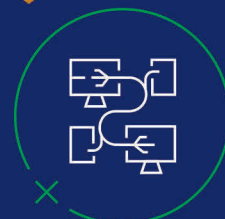
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COVER:

Glenn Orsmond, Comair's chief executive officer, discusses the South African airline's dramatic fall from grace in 2020 and what he is doing to head up the fightback.

PICTURE: COMAIR

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Time for our leaders to step up and act together

Leadership is never in demand as much as when crisis happens. There is no doubt that the crisis our aviation industry faces now is going to be with us for some time.

So, there are unlikely to be short-term solutions, nor will leaders be able to carry on doing the same things as before.

At the African Airlines Association (AFRAA) Stakeholders' Convention, Raphael Kuuchi, the organisation's consulting director for government, legal & industry affairs, revealed that, since the start of the pandemic, at least eight African airlines have gone out of business, and many more were gasping for breath.

Throughout this issue you will read about many leaders rolling out ideas to deliver a brighter future. But look out for the words of wisdom from an outgoing leader.

Chris Zweigenthal has spent almost 20 years in the leadership team at the Airlines Association of Southern Africa (AASA) and has been admired for his calm diplomacy in often difficult positions.

He steps down from the post next month and I am sorry to see him going. Our air transport editor, Victoria Moores, asked Chris if there was anything he would like to have

done differently. The answer was greater communication with government. "We've got to find a way to break through and get a willingness from government to interact more with industry and listen to them."

That is a message echoed at the AFRAA event and by the International Air Transport Association's (IATA's) new regional vice president, Kamil Al Alwadi.

Ethiopian Airlines CCO, Esayas Woldemariam, called for greater airline cooperation, supported by African Union initiatives, such as the African continental free trade area (AfCFTA) and the single African air transport market (SAATM).

And this is the challenge.

Africa and the African aviation industry CAN emerge from this time of crisis, but it does need to be clearer with government and clearer with competition. Working together and with the support of government, African carriers can become the airlines of choice for people on the continent. The door for a bright future has opened and the leaders need to walk through and lead.

Alan Peaford, editor-in-chief



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REPORTAGE EN FRANÇAIS



RwandAir gets Diamond ring of confidence

RwandAir has been awarded Diamond status from APEX Health Safety for the airline's sustained work to ensure the highest standards of cleanliness and sanitisation for its customers and crew.

Yvonne Manzi Makolo, the airline's CEO, said: "Reaching the highest attainable level for hygiene standards is a powerful clean bill of health for the airline, and validation for all the hard work we have put in to ensure the safest possible traveller experience for our customers and staff."

"We know restoring customer confidence to fly is critical to resume safe international travel, which is why we have undertaken a 360-degree approach to ensuring that every aspect of our operations meets the highest standards."

Hard work: RwandAir credits its staff for the new award.

PICTURE: RWANDAIR

Morocco resumes flights

Flights to and from Morocco have begun to restart. The gradual re-opening started on June 15 and will take into account the ever-changing situation with regards to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Juba training

Staff at Juba International Airport conducted safety training in June as part of a programme to modernise South Sudan's sovereign airspace.

Air traffic control officers have been trained under the supervision of NavPass, the modern airspace specialists, which provided a certified officer from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to train staff.

Exhibition date

The International Aerospace & Defence Exhibition (IADE) Tunisia will take place on March 11-15 next year at the international airport of Djerba-Zarzis. The event will showcase more than 200 exhibiting companies from around the world, and will host a large number of African delegations, as well as decision-makers from

Tunisia, Africa and the Middle East.

EgyptAir boost

The EgyptAir Training Academy has successfully passed the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) initial qualification audit for its A220-300 newest full-flight simulator.

EASA's audit team praised the technical status and performance of the device.

Island service

Angola's expanding Bestfly airline has begun providing inter-island services in Cape Verde. The six-month contract follows the withdrawal of Transportes Interilhas de Cabo Verde (TICV), which decided to cease operations. Bestfly began operating between Praia and São Vicente with a single ATR-72

"Our commitment to

Cape Verde is total and we intend to immediately start hiring local staff," said Nuno Pereira, executive director and founder of Bestfly.

African connections

Kenya Airways and Airlink have signed an interline agreement that will extend the airlines' reach in the southern Africa region via Johannesburg and Cape Town. Under the agreement,

Kenya Airways customers flying to South Africa will be able to connect with Airlink-operated flights to Windhoek, Durban, Gaborone, Maseru, Pemba, Maputo, and Port Elizabeth, among others.

It will also enable Airlink passengers to book a through ticket to Nairobi and enjoy connections to the rest of Kenya Airways' destinations within Africa, including Entebbe, Kigali, Dar es Salaam, Bujumbura, and Kinshasa.

Cleared for take-off

The Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) has lifted a suspension order against local carrier, Azman Air, after it implemented a corrective plan to address safety matters on the B737.

The NCAA said: "We have reviewed the corrective action plans that were developed and implemented to address the non-compliance and non-conformances identified by the audit and found them satisfactory."

New freighter

FlyEgypt is planning to add a further Boeing 737-800 to its freighter fleet.



Celebration: Vince Goncalves and Eldrid de Villiers, regional sales manager Africa, with the award.

PICTURE: EXECUJET MRO SERVICES

ExecuJet MRO Services certification

ExecuJet MRO Services, the Lanseria-based corporate and VIP aircraft maintenance and repair business, has achieved US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) certification.

"The FAA certification is a valuable endorsement of our ongoing investment and focus on safety, quality and skills," said Vince Goncalves, ExecuJet MRO Services vice president for Africa.

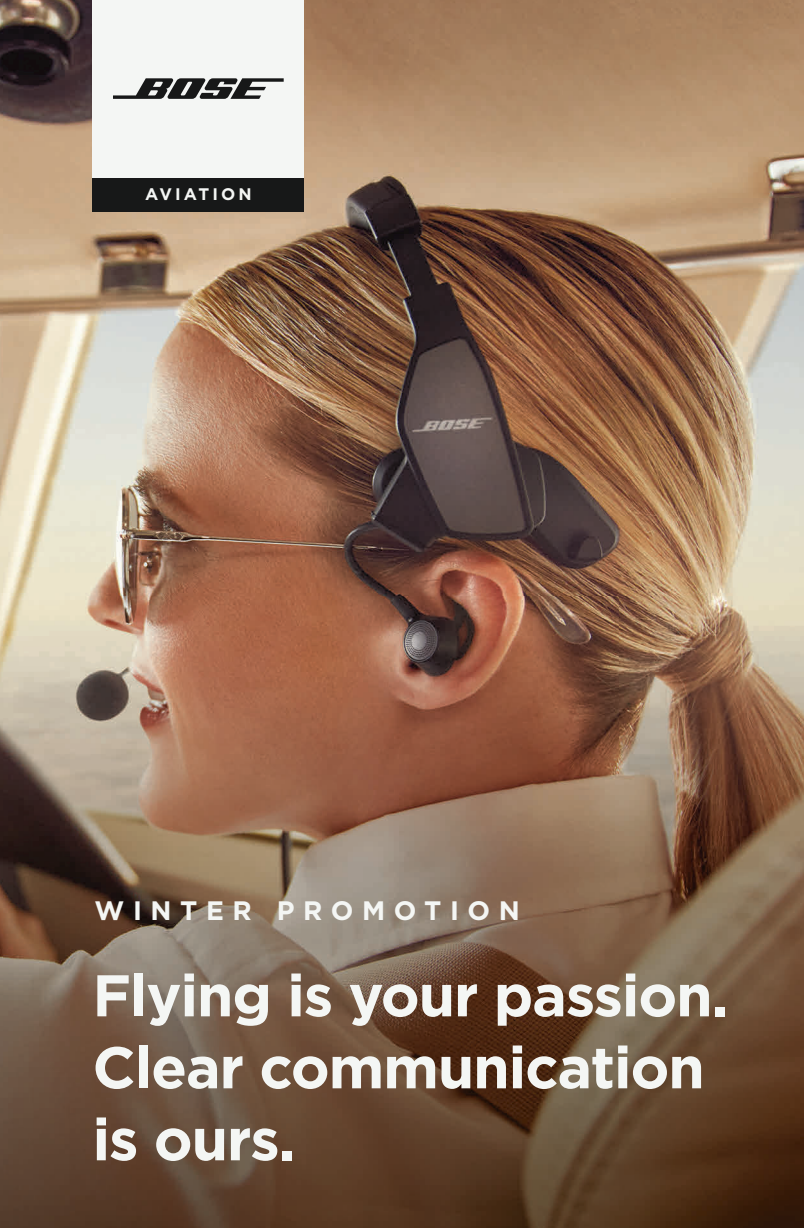
"It permits us to inspect, maintain and make

alterations to US-registered aircraft, their engines, avionics, flight instruments and other accessories, at our Lanseria International Airport repair centre near Johannesburg."

ExecuJet MRO Services' South African facility provides maintenance support for numerous makes and marques of aircraft. It also holds a number of airworthiness authority approvals from civil aviation authorities across sub-Saharan Africa.

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Consulting Africa

ACC Aviation, which has offices in five global continents, has reported an upsurge in consultancy work in Africa. The business has been active internationally in aircraft sales transactions, business advisory and restructuring programmes, together with consultancy projects, including a number in Africa.

Battling back together

EgyptAir Air has signed a codeshare agreement with Oman Air for flights between Muscat and Cairo. The deal was signed as part of the airlines' commitment to work toward a strong restart for air travel to overcome the effects of the spread of Covid-19.

African footprints

ACIA Aero Leasing, a provider of regional aircraft leasing and lease management services, has purchased two Embraer ERJ145 aircraft from Jetcraft.

The aircraft were transported to Johannesburg, South Africa, from Toulouse, France, for pre-delivery maintenance work before entering into service with ACIA's existing airline customers.

ACIA chief executive officer, Mick Mooney, said:

Late hiccup holds up the launch of Green Africa

A late hitch has postponed the launch of Nigerian start-up carrier, Green Africa, by around a month. The airline was scheduled to launch on June 24 but, at a joint meeting between the Nigerian CAA and senior executives of Green Africa, it was concluded that the carrier's air operator's certificate (AOC) would not be available until July.

Former Morgan Stanley investment banker, Babawande Afolabi, started work on the Green Africa value-airline project in 2014. However, the airline has already faced several setbacks, including the prolonged grounding of its originally planned aircraft type – the Boeing 737MAX.

Lagos-based Green Africa has received three ATR 72-600s from ACIA Aero Leasing and will launch with flights to six Nigerian destinations – Akure, Ilorin, Abuja, Enugu, Owerri and Port Harcourt.

The start-up is already exploring other destinations within Nigeria, along with two more operational bases outside Lagos.

"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," Afolabi said.

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

New arrival: Green Africa completed the acceptance of its third ATR 72-600 from ACIA Aero Leasing. The aircraft arrived in Lagos on June 3.

PICTURE: GREEN AFRICA.

"The transaction is part of continued efforts to strengthen our already significant footprint in South Africa."

Help for Rwanda

Air Austral operated a Boeing 777-300ER in June to deliver medical equipment that will be used to set up an emergency camp in Rwanda.

The operation was carried out in partnership with the Reunion Island Red Cross and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Air Austral transported 45 tonnes of humanitarian

cargo, including 2,000 emergency shelter kits and 4,000 tarpaulins.

African initiative

United Aviation Solutions (UTD) and the African Airlines Association (AFRAA) have launched the Brown Condor initiative aimed at providing a platform for AFRAA members with MRO facilities to support their North American counterparts.

UTD and AFRAA have created a portal that will ensure the reliable delivery of equipment and services to airline customers and channel partners.

Baby drama

An EgyptAir flight from N'Djamena to Cairo had to make an emergency landing at Aswan Airport after a baby was born on board.

A 27-year-old Chadian passenger gave birth to a boy with the help of the cabin crew and a medical student, who was also a passenger on the flight.

Mother and baby were taken to Aswan University Hospital.

Israel connection

Morocco and Israel will be connected by a direct route to

develop tourism and trade. The agreement, part of the peace accord signed by the countries in December, will allow direct flights (including freight) between Israel and all international airports in Morocco, with no restrictions.

The Judeo-Moroccan community represent 50,000 visitors per year.

Red Sea move

Air Cairo and SunExpress, a Turkish-German airline based in Antalya, have signed a cooperation agreement that will allow up to 30 flights per week to the Red Sea resort of Hurghada from 14 airports in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

Cabo Verde Airlines resumes services

Cabo Verde Airlines was scheduled to officially resume flights as *African Aerospace* was going to press. The airline was planning a weekly flight on Fridays between Sal Island and Lisbon. The resumption will be gradual, connecting the archipelago through the hub in Sal.

Egypt Air Force orders 30 extra Rafale fighters

Egypt has placed an order for 30 additional Rafale fighter jets for its air force.

This new order complements the first tranche of 24 Rafales signed six years ago and will bring the number of the type flying under Egyptian colours to 54.

This makes the Egyptian Air Force the second largest Rafale operator in the world after France.

"This new order is proof of our unfailing bond of nearly 50 years that unites us with Egypt, the first foreign user of the Rafale – as it was for the Mirage 2000," said Eric Trappier, chairman and CEO of Dassault Aviation.

"It is also a tribute to the Rafale's operational quality, as this is the second time an export customer has chosen to order additional aircraft," he added.



PICTURE: DASSAULT AVIATION, A PECCHI



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“ We were once Africa’s favourite airline and, with loyal support from our customers, we are optimistic about claiming this title back. ”

THOMAS KGOKOLO



TITLE CHALLENGE

South Africa’s embattled state-owned airline, SAA, has appointed Thomas Kgokolo as interim chief executive officer. His task is to prepare the airline for the relaunch of flight operations – now provisionally expected in the third quarter of 2021. Guy Leitch asked how his Herculean task is progressing.

A significant challenge for SAA over the past 20 years has been a lack of management continuity. Including interim appointees, the airline has had 20 chief executives in the past 10 years – and Kgokolo is the fifth in the past five.

Is this job not the ultimate ‘hospital pass’ – a classic poisoned chalice, which will ruin a CEO’s career?

Kgokolo has hedged his bets by accepting the job only on an interim basis. “I’m told that this job is career-limiting. But I will apply my experience in business and skills to contribute to the airline’s turnaround,” he said.

“The success of the new SAA is a reflection on all of us as South Africans, so I am here to rebuild an airline that all South Africans can be proud of.

“SAA is a business, like any other, and I have significant business transformation experience, which will enable me to relaunch the airline.”

Kgokolo said the biggest current challenge is the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation industry. “My main objective is to get SAA back where it belongs – in the skies and flying the South African flag, with the intent of recapturing the hearts of our customers,” he said.

His approach is “to stabilise SAA during this transition”, so that, when a strategic equity partner (SEP) comes on board, the airline is on a sound footing.

“The closure of borders continues to have a negative impact on the revenue and cash flow of the business. This situation is also making it difficult to plan for a sustainable restart,” he explained.

“The aviation industry is not in a good state. However, the long-term sustainability of the airline will be enhanced by a strategic partner. We are optimistic that this presents opportunities for those who have a long-term view and realise the potential that SAA provides.”

Kgokolo said his second objective is to prepare the airline for the SEP, which is expected to buy a key shareholding, as well as provide essential funding and skills for the restart of operations. He acknowledged: “This will require a massive amount of work – just in terms of getting the airline back into a regulatory-compliant condition.”

One of the key challenges he faces is dealing with the long-running pilots’ strike. Some 89% of SAA pilots were members of the SAA Pilots

Continued
on Page 10



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Association (SAAPA) and they have been in a bitter fight with the airline to enforce long-standing employment agreements (the regulating agreement) that the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) considers opposes the government's transformation agenda.

Kgokolo regards a timely resolution of the deadlock with SAAPA as essential to enable the airline to do proper planning. "The airline's main interest is for this issue to be resolved speedily, as it negatively affects the conclusion of the business rescue process and the planning for the restart," he said.

A late May Labour Court decision, dismissing an interim relief application by SAAPA preventing SAA from engaging replacement pilots and flight trainers/services during the strike, means the airline can now proceed with

so that we are all clear about the way forward."

At the same time, SAA Technical is reported to be retrenching 1,200 of its 2,000 staff. A key question is whether that will leave enough capacity for the support and maintenance of the SAA and Mango fleets when they relaunch?

Kgokolo said the demand for these companies' services has changed. "They cannot keep doing the same thing while the market has radically changed due to Covid-19. We have to reposition the businesses to align them with the current challenges. But I must emphasise that we regard our employees as significant stakeholders and we are doing everything within our power to safeguard their jobs. Fortunately, we have excellent support from the SAA board and from the DPE, as our shareholder."

SAA's cargo division has also been battling.

A340-600s.

The Airbus A340s have out-dated in-flight entertainment and, being four engine 'quads', are fuel inefficient compared to modern twins, such as the A350 and B787.

Kgokolo said: "Negotiations are under way to ensure that SAA has an appropriate fleet for the airline's restart, at affordable cost. We are expecting the role of the SEP to be pertinent in the final fleet configuration."

Despite all these challenges, plus the less tangible need to rebuild staff morale and trust in the brand from its once loyal customers, Kgokolo said: "SAA as a flag-carrier is a tool for nation-building and national identity. More importantly, it is a good instrument for promoting both economic and social development, especially in relation to the

tourism industry.

"My immediate action, as interim CEO, is to rebuild trust and identity to the remaining SAA employees, who have gone through a difficult period.

"I intend leading by example and being transparent.

"Since we are a customer-facing entity, it is key to ensure that we have motivated staff. SAA's employees are committed to the course and are resilient. We are planning to re-board our employees first, into an energised and accountable corporate

culture, as we get ready to welcome our customers on board our aircraft again. We are all excited to be part of this journey."

Kgokolo acknowledged that SAA has lost much of its pre-Covid market share. "The longer SAA remains on the ground, the more challenging it will be to gain momentum, particularly on regional routes," he pointed out.

"However, I still believe SAA is a good African brand, judging by social media. Our customers want us back for the proudly South African hospitality that only SAA can provide in the market.

"We were once Africa's favourite airline and, with loyal support from our customers, we are optimistic about claiming this title back."

When asked if he would be available for a permanent job as CEO, Kgokolo replied: "My task currently is to get SAA on good ground, so the business attracts the SEP we are looking for. Once I accomplish this, it will be up to the SEP to make permanent appointments. Personally, it has always been my intention to start my PhD and I look forward to being able to do that in the years ahead."



Still going: The Airbus A340s have out-dated in-flight entertainment and, being four-engine 'quads', are fuel inefficient compared to modern twins.

PICTURE: SAA

its plans for a relaunch.

Kgokolo said: "While we welcome the Labour Court decision, we remain committed to finding a workable solution to end the impasse with SAA pilots. But we are also resolute in pursuing our goal of getting SAA back in the skies in the third quarter. It would be our fervent wish that all staff, including our pilots, as well as passengers, be part of this process."

A further key challenge for Kgokolo, as the SAA group's interim chief executive, is the airline's three loss-making subsidiaries – Mango, SAA Technical, and Air Chefs.

Mango was grounded at the end of April 2021 for the non-payment of fees to the Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA). Kgokolo is apologetic: "We regret that Mango left more than 3,500 passengers stranded when it was grounded. One of my tasks is to support our subsidiaries until they receive the 2.7 billion Rand (\$196 million) – Mango's share is approximately R819 million – that has been allocated to them by the government.

"We are concentrating on making sure that we have improved communication with Mango's guests

Due to the worldwide cutback on passenger flights, the lack of belly space in passenger flights for cargo has thrown the airline industry and, in particular, competitor Ethiopian Airlines, a lifeline by operating pure cargo flights.

However, SAA missed this lifeline as it was not flying. Public Enterprises Minister, Pravin Gordhan, has told the South African Parliament in the past that cargo could be a good focus for SAA. Kgokolo agreed, saying: "My approach will be to plan strategically and build on the relationships that the cargo division has made over the years of operating, especially with a number of active partners.

"The intention is not to start a cargo operation only. However, it does provide an opportunity for a restart, building on the experience the airline has in this space."

The next challenge is rebuilding SAA's much-depleted aircraft fleet. During the rescue process, the business rescue practitioners negotiated the return of most aircraft to the lessors, leaving the airline with a few aircraft it owns, most of which are around 20 years old.

The current fleet consists of three A319s, two A320s, one A330-300, four A340-300s and four



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South Africa's Comair had its worst ever year in 2020 – and Covid-19 was just the half of it. Martin Rivers talked to chief executive, Glenn Orsmond.

Inverted Comair

BELEAGUERED AIRLINE BATTLES TO TURN THINGS AROUND

It was only two short years ago that Comair, the privately owned South African airline, chalked up its 73rd year of uninterrupted profitability – an achievement without parallel in the airline industry.

To say that the company fell from grace in 2020 would be a dramatic understatement.

Already on-track for its first ever annual loss, Comair unexpectedly ran out of cash in May and collapsed into bankruptcy protection. Its return to the skies in December was only possible after shareholders agreed to write off 99% of their equity in the insolvent airline.

For chief executive, Glenn Orsmond, there must have been a temptation to blame everything on Covid-19.

He might also have pointed the finger at Boeing, whose bungled launch and subsequent grounding of the 737MAX forced the airline to abandon its fleet renewal programme.

□□□□□

But the industry veteran isn't in the mood for excuses.

"Comair had become fat and lazy. It had become complacent," Orsmond said, issuing a blistering assessment of the legacy left by his predecessor, Erik Venter.

"It had lost its cost advantage in the market; our competitors had much lower costs and were starting to win market share, so it was a cost problem. I think that often happens with really successful organisations over a period of time; success breeds a certain arrogance."

The re-launched airline is sticking with the dual-brand model that served it so well up until last year. Premium flights will still be marketed under a British Airways franchise, while low-cost services will fly under the Kulula name.

Behind the scenes, however, the investment consortium that bailed out Comair with 500 million



Glenn Orsmond:
"Comair had become fat and lazy. It had become complacent."

PICTURE: COMAIR

rand (\$35m) has pushed through swingeing reforms to make the business sustainable.

Fixed costs were "almost halved" during a six-month restructuring programme, Orsmond said, with staff numbers falling from about 2,200 to about 1,600.

Most of the cost-cutting was directed at Kulula, which has struggled to hold its own against local rivals FlySafair and Mango, the no-frills subsidiary of South African Airways (SAA), the country's flag-carrier. A third low-cost airline, Lift, also entered the market in December.

"Success in the leisure market is based on being able to charge low fares, and the secret there is to have low operating costs," Orsmond explained.

"That's what we've achieved in this business rescue process. It's provided us protection in order to restructure our cost base. We restructured the cost base significantly down in Kulula in terms of all the big numbers – staff, overheads, maintenance, aircraft leases – and we're now able to offer lower airfares than we were in the past."

Demand for Kulula's seats has remained relatively stable in recent years, he insisted, with the influx of competition failing to dent bookings.

"Our problem is that we weren't making money at 80% load factor. So we only had the

cost problem in the business, really. We never had a revenue problem."

When it comes to future growth, however, it is the BA brand that Orsmond is most excited about.

Comair became a franchise partner of the UK flag-carrier in 1996, leveraging the reputation of the "world's favourite airline" to attract business travellers across southern Africa. BA's prestige has waned since then, failing to keep pace with the luxurious offerings of its Gulf and Asian rivals. But the brand remains popular in South Africa.

With flag-carrier SAA now facing an uncertain future – its own bankruptcy protection has failed to deliver progress after more than a year – Orsmond sees an opportunity to scoop up more premium traffic.

"In all likelihood, South African Airways will either not re-emerge or it will come back much smaller," he said, predicting a larger role for Mango in the short-haul market as SAA retreats to a handful of intercontinental routes.

□□□□□

"Our strategy is for British Airways to really dominate as the business airline in southern Africa and South Africa. In terms of doing that, there are four key elements we are focused on.

"One is route network, so British Airways will be on all the domestic routes and all the major regional routes.

"Second is frequencies; we are pushing for higher frequencies on the BA brand.

"Thirdly, we are focusing on the product. Our product is superior in terms of on-board catering, lounge access, a whole host of things.

"And then the fourth element is the frequent flyer programme that we have under the BA umbrella."

The strategy began taking shape in March, when Comair extended BA services to a further two domestic routes – Johannesburg-East London and Cape Town-East London.

**Heading for a brighter future:
The cost base has been
restructured significantly.**

PICTURE: COMAIR



That gave the brand a presence on all of the main city pairs in South Africa, also including Johannesburg-Cape Town, Johannesburg-Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg-Durban, Cape Town-Durban, Cape Town-Port Elizabeth and Durban-Port Elizabeth.

Kulula also operates in several of those markets, as well as serving the Johannesburg-George sector and using Lanseria International Airport as a secondary base for Johannesburg.

Asked about the Johannesburg-Cape Town trunk route – by far the largest market in South Africa – Orsmond said he envisaged up to 11 BA flights per day when demand recovers, versus seven with the Kulula brand.

He also stressed that the post-pandemic expansion would not be limited to domestic operations.

BA served five international routes from Johannesburg prior to the onset of Covid-19: Harare and Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe), Windhoek (Namibia), Livingstone (Zambia) and Port Louis (Mauritius). Harare was the first sector to be restored in March, but management are not content with simply re-opening their stations.

“We are submitting a lot of applications to the Air Services Licensing Council for further African destinations,” Orsmond confirmed. “We have a clear focus on BA, and particularly on creating a network and relying on the strength of

the BA brand, which is really a powerful brand in southern Africa.”

Lusaka (Zambia), Nairobi (Kenya), Lubumbashi (the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar (Tanzania) are among the points being targeted.

Asked whether the BA brand might seem out-of-place on intra-African routes, he said the results of the decades-old partnership speak for themselves.

“It’s a global brand – British Airways – it’s not a British brand. And South Africa is really comfortable using global brands. So it’s a major strength of our offering.”



Beyond the franchise agreement, however, it is worth noting that BA’s parent International Airlines Group (IAG) is not party to the consortium that acquired 99% of Comair during the bailout – meaning that BA’s pre-existing 11.5% stake in the South African airline has been diluted to about 0.1%.

Turning to the fleet, Orsmond said the number of operational aircraft should reach 25 by July – up from 17 in April (11 BA and six Kulula). But none of them will be MAXes.

Despite placing an order for eight of the next-generation aircraft in 2013, Comair had only received one unit by the time the type was grounded over problems with its flight-control

system MCAS – a design flaw that claimed 346 lives in crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia.

“We only flew it for a week or two, and then the fleet got grounded globally,” Orsmond complained.

“Subsequent to that, aircraft two and three were due for delivery but weren’t delivered [on-time]. So we are in talks with Boeing about the future of the MAX. We have not made a final decision for now.”

Three days after our interview, Comair announced, via an amendment to its business rescue plan, that it intends to cancel the purchase agreement. Honouring the deal, it said, would “result in significant hardship” and pose “a threat to the future viability of the company”.

Boeing has not acknowledged the cancellation and still lists seven units for Comair in its order backlog.

Even so, while relations have undoubtedly soured, neither side will want to jeopardise their longstanding partnership. Comair had already made clear in February 2020 that compensation was needed if the order was to be saved.

A bigger concern for Orsmond is ramping up operations with the existing 737 Classic and NG fleet, while dodging the pitfalls that brought the airline to the brink last year.

“We need to avoid distractions right now, and focus on our business,” he stressed. “We need to make it lean and mean.”

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Chris Zweigenthal joined the Airlines Association of Southern Africa (AASA) as deputy CEO in February 2002 and became CEO in March 2009. After nearly 20 years of his trademark calm diplomacy, Zweigenthal is retiring in August 2021 and relocating to the US to be with family.

Victoria Moores wanted to know more about the changes he's witnessed and his thoughts for the future.

'LEGEND' LEAVING A PROUD LEGACY

Q What significant changes have you seen since you became AASA deputy CEO in 2002?

A When I joined [AASA], we had just come out of 9/11 [a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda against the United States], so the world started to change quite significantly in terms of security culture.

We've also seen the development of low-cost carriers.

The African low-cost airline industry started in South Africa, and within the region of Africa thereafter as well. This created a much more competitive environment and this competition has gradually increased throughout the 20 years that I've been here.

Private airlines started coming into the market quite extensively – and also exiting the market. I think there's been probably around a dozen airlines that have exited the market since the early 1990s, since we had deregulation in South Africa. Throughout that period of time, a lot of state-owned airlines started to experience problems in terms of their sustainability.

Q And how are things now?

A Nothing could prepare us for what happened in early 2020, which threw us completely off track. I'm leaving the industry in South Africa at a time when recovery from the massive Covid-19 pandemic is still unfinished business.

Q How do you see the future for southern African airlines?

A If we look at some of the programmes that we've been working on, such as the single African air transport market (SAATM) on the liberalisation side, as well as the African continental free trade area (AfCFTA), there are a lot of opportunities there for the development of trade, as well as our passenger numbers.

We've got to make a conscious effort to restart aviation, to find ways to convince international states that Africa is open for business.

I think you're also going to see a

Continued
on Page 16



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

consolidation of some of the airlines in the region. It's going to be a tough journey ahead for the next year, probably two years. But, in general, there's no reason why Africa cannot grow and get itself back out of this negative situation.

Q What's been your greatest success during your time at AASA?

A I think it's been the ability to really take a leadership role in a lot of the 'on-the-ground' issues. Together with the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the Board of Airline Representatives in South Africa, we've had a lot of ability to influence and really make contributions to the development of infrastructure and to work in the interests of the airline industry.

We've tried to ensure that costs are reduced – or maintained at a reasonable level – and to ensure that service standards are maintained and improved where possible.

We've developed a lot of good relationships with our infrastructure service-provider colleagues and I think it's been very successful.

It's been a very enriching experience, being involved with all the various stakeholders on

Engineering a career

Zweigenthal, who is a civil engineer by profession, began his career with state-owned South African rail, port and pipeline company Transnet.

In 1988, he joined South African Airways (SAA), where he held management positions in petroleum affairs, flight operations, and marketing planning, before becoming VP for global passenger services.

While Zweigenthal was at SAA, he was seconded to Kampala in Uganda for two years as managing director of SA Alliance Air, a South African, Tanzanian and Ugandan joint-venture carrier.

the government side, as well as the public and private sector.

Q Do you have any standout memories that you'll be taking with you?

A I have enjoyed working with different people; with very different characters. Some of them are tough – you have a really tough time discussing things with them – but there are also people that are very open and honest. And I don't mind either, because I think you learn from every single person that you come into contact with.

One of the highlights for me is when we meet for our annual general assembly (AGA). Although we have different opinions and different agendas, we can come together and solve problems together. That's really been a highlight for me, throughout the 20 years.

Q What would be your main piece of advice for your successor?

A All of us have got our different characters and different ways of doing business. Be your own person. Get to know the business and the people that you're working with very closely, because,

although we may have different agendas, you have to work with each other to get to a final solution.

I know that there are certain areas where I look back and say 'I should have done this differently'. Don't be shy to change things, to put your views on the table, to challenge existing scenarios and say 'this is not the way it should be done'.

Q With 2020 hindsight, what would you do differently?

A I still think there was an area, in the ability to interact at a very senior level with government, that I would like to have achieved more on.

I still firmly believe that input from the private sector, and the sector in general, can influence decisions at policy level. We've got to find a way to break through and get a willingness from government to interact more with industry and listen to them.

Q It would be sad to see you leave aviation altogether. Is this really goodbye?

A Once aviation gets in your blood, it's very difficult to get it out of your blood.

I'm retiring from AASA at the end of August, but I'm hoping to be able to find some way to retain an interest in aviation and to continue working in the industry, should opportunities arise.

I'm certainly not closing the door on aviation. ■

Chris is a legend in the southern African air transport industry and is widely regarded for his tenacity, calm diplomacy and energetic work ethic.

While we have confronted – and continue to face – serious challenges, the airline industry in southern Africa is deeply indebted to Chris for the constructive engagement and goodwill that he has fostered across the sector, especially with government regulators, policy makers, legislators and state-run infrastructure service providers throughout the Southern African Development Community. We wish Chris and his family a well-deserved retirement. He will leave big shoes to fill.

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*Captain Abdelhadi Mansur, general manager of Benghazi-based Berniq Airways, talks to **Martin Rivers** about his plans for the Libyan start-up.*



Warhorse: The new airline launched operations with a nine-year-old Airbus A320.
PICTURES: BERNIQ AIRWAYS.

Berniq launches with a mission to unify

Libya's Berniq Airways took to the skies in March with an inaugural service from home base, Benghazi, to capital city, Tripoli. The new airline, which is named after Princess Berenice II of ancient Egypt, launched operations with a nine-year-old Airbus A320.

Its largest shareholder is Benghazi's Bank of Commerce & Development, which is partly state-owned. But, with 60% of the company in private hands, general manager, Captain Abdelhadi Mansur, said he has no concerns about political interference.

"The company has nothing to do with the government of the country," he said. "The traditional [state-owned] airlines lost a lot of aircraft during the war, and because of this the country became very short of large aircraft. So the private sector started working."

Flying the Benghazi-Tripoli trunk route is symbolically important, Mansur said, as it underlines Berniq's commitment to serving the whole of the war-torn nation.

Libya's other domestic airlines are all headquartered in Tripoli, which was, until recently, the power base of the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA). Benghazi, meanwhile, is the stronghold of warlord Khalifa Haftar, who commands the Libyan National Army (LNA), and for years threw his weight behind a rival government in the eastern city of Tobruk.

While the GNA and LNA have nationalistic names, the reality is that Libya has been mired in civil war for a decade – making travel between east and west a challenging and, at times, treacherous affair.

Hopes for a better future were bolstered in March, when

a new Government of National Unity was sworn in.

Its chances of success are unclear. But, whatever happens on the political front, Mansur is keen for Berniq to help the citizens of Libya get moving after years of strife.

"Our airline has hubs in Benghazi and Tripoli, and we will try to provide for Libya and connect Libya to the neighbouring countries and to Africa," he affirmed. "Wherever there is interest in the company and we can make money, we will go for it."

The network has already grown to include flights from Tripoli to another two eastern destinations – Tobruk and Al Labraq, near Bayda. All flights to and from the capital are routed via Mitiga International Airport, as Tripoli International Airport remains closed following years of aerial bombardment.

Berniq's second A320 was scheduled for delivery at the time of writing and talks are at an "advanced stage" for up to two further units.

"I hope we are going to reach four aircraft this year, but for sure [it will be at least] three," Mansur confirmed. "Then, when the country has settled down and everything has smoothed out and... the Covid problem is solved, I'm sure we would increase our fleet. We have good opportunities to increase the fleet."

He said Tripoli is likely to become the airline's main operating base due to the size of its population.

One aircraft may also be stationed in Sabha when the southern city joins the network.

Management are evaluating charter flights to Libya's oilfields with a smaller A319, but probably not before foreign workers return in greater numbers. The charter segment is currently dominated by Petro Air, a subsidiary of the state-run National Oil Corporation.

Asked when he plans to unveil international services, Mansur said the intent is there but Libyan carriers face heavy restrictions when crossing borders.

Aircraft registered in the country have been banned from EU skies since 2012, and many Arab and African countries remain wary of their neighbour – jarred by video footage of bombed runways and smouldering wreckage. "With all the problems and restrictions, Libyan airlines have a hard time going anywhere," Mansur shrugged.

Only a handful of regional points are currently served by local operators. No foreign airlines fly to Libya.

Nonetheless, Mansur identified Cairo (Egypt), Istanbul (Turkey), Khartoum (Sudan), Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) and Niamey (Niger) as markets of interest. Berniq's website also names Alexandria (Egypt), Amman (Jordan), Djerba and Tunis (Tunisia) and Dubai (UAE).

“We will try to provide for Libya and connect Libya to the neighbouring countries and to Africa.”

CAPTAIN ABDELHADI MANSUR



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Optimistic: De Havilland Canada is hoping that the pause in its Dash 8-400 programme is temporary. PICTURE: DHC
Right: ATR is targeting the regional air cargo market with its newly launched purpose-built freighter. PICTURE: ATR



Propping up a challenging market

Turboprops own the niche of short, low-density sectors into small or challenging airfields – a common enough description of domestic air travel in Africa. But is it a viable market? Chuck Grieve reports.

Right-sized aircraft are what Africa needs for the expected post-pandemic proliferation of domestic services. If the chatter is correct, that means De Havilland Canada (DHC) and ATR battling it out in a market they both view as important.

Both OEMs are bullish about their prospects in a post-Covid operating environment, and both are bringing new ideas to the table in search of orders.

Latest figures show the DHC Dash 8 currently dominates, boasting more than 160 examples with about 40 operators; DHC said 82% of the fleet is currently in service.

This compares with more than 120 ATR 42s and 72s in service across Africa and the Middle East. The Franco-Italian company's most recent market forecast flagged up a potential market for 350 more turboprops in the joint region.

ATR chief executive, Stefano Bortoli, outlining his company's recovery plans, said turboprops "remain the best choice" for underserved regions such as Africa.

As part of its plans to strengthen its presence in the next decade, the OEM has introduced a purpose-built freighter, the ATR 72-600F, and a short take-off and landing (STOL) variant, the ATR 42-600S.

The first -600F was delivered to FedEx last December, while first flight of the -600S is expected in 2023, its design having been frozen in May.

Ethiopian Airlines and Air Madagascar are among customers of Elix Aviation Capital, the Dublin-based turboprop lessor, which accounts for 10 of the 20 firm orders for the -600S.

ATR's Mark Dunnachie, head of commercial for EMEA, said: "More right-sized aircraft will be needed to satisfy the demand – evident before the crisis – for increased regional connectivity across all of Africa."

Already this year, Nigerian start-up, Green Africa, has opted for the 78-seat ATR 72-600.

Dunnachie said the outlook for ATR is strong: "We see many promising new markets, particularly across central Africa. This will, in turn, drive our expanding support network."

Not to be outdone, DHC is positioning itself for a strong recovery based on the hot-and-high performance characteristics, high payload, and operational efficiency of the Dash 8, which address market gaps where little to no air connectivity exists.

David Curtis, executive chairman of DHC owner, Longview Aviation Capital, said: "We fully expect worldwide demand for the Dash 8 to return. While industry conditions remain challenging, we are looking to the future by enhancing our ability to support Dash 8 operators."

These enhancements include accelerating planned business improvements plus the development of DHC's own online customer portal and global spare parts distribution network.

DHC expects to see a greater portion of the future fleet in specialised roles, such as firefighting, freight, maritime patrol, and intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) missions.



DHC supports operators with field service representatives (FSRs) in Ethiopia, Kenya, Angola, and South Africa, and authorised service facilities (ASFs) concentrated in the north and east of the continent at Ethiopian Airlines (Africa's biggest Dash 8 operator), Mediterranean Aviation (Medavia) in Malta, and Abu Dhabi's Falcon Aviation Services.

Longview completed its acquisition of the entire Dash 8 programme, including all -100/200/300/400 variants, in June 2019. However, the transition from Bombardier's ownership has not been without its challenges, compounded by Covid-19 and the collapse of aviation.

A combination of circumstances forced DHC to announce a "pause" in production of the -400, the only variant still being built. No date has been given for restarting, the airframer saying only that production will resume "at the earliest possible time, subject to market demand".

Market demand is complicated. As if competition from ATR wasn't enough, the used aircraft market for Dash 8s has been bloated by the grounding of several regional operators put out of business by the pandemic.

Fortunately for DHC, the glut – estimated by Leeham News at more than 180 examples – is slowly easing. A DHC spokesman said: "We are starting to see the grounded fleet re-introduced into established markets and into new regions to restore or develop new domestic and regional services."

DHC is well aware of the state of the used aircraft market and, while the company would "prefer not to have to buy used aircraft", it might consider a deal involving trade-ins if a new order hinged on it.

Steady endurance and clear direction will be needed over the coming years, so it was fitting that Ethiopia – a country renowned for its long-distance runners – was the virtual host for this year’s African Airlines Association (AFRAA) Aviation Stakeholders’ Convention. Victoria Moores reports.

Marathon runners must work together to stay in the race

According to US runner Bill Buffum: “The marathon is not really about the marathon, it’s about the shared struggle.” Many African airlines will relate to this shared struggle.

Raphael Kuuchi AFRAA consulting director for government, legal & industry affairs, told delegates: “Since the beginning of 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic struck, at least eight African airlines have gone out of business, or are in the process of doing so.”

Foreign competitors always seem to hold the advantage and the running conditions are challenging. However, just like an athlete, AFRAA host carrier, Ethiopian Airlines, has spent the last decade strengthening its muscles in lots of different business areas, building up endurance.



“We do not have a very rich uncle to support us,” Ethiopian Airlines CCO, Esayas Woldemariam, said. “There has not been any government support [during the Covid crisis] by way of a cash bailout. And, surprisingly enough, there has not been any lay-offs among our 17,000 employees. All of them have stayed on the payroll. So, we succeeded in this, all on our own, with our agile strategy.”

When passenger traffic fell, Ethiopian repurposed 25 passenger aircraft as freighters and stepped up its third-party maintenance work. “Passenger repatriation charters also helped,” Woldemariam said. “With this, and related businesses, we were able to stay cash positive and to pay salaries. We also did a lot of cost-saving activities.”

Ethiopian is now focusing on biosafety measures, such as vaccine passports and touchless travel, as traffic begins to return.

“Biosafety is becoming the differentiator for the comfort of our customers – and for cost management,” he said.

Woldemariam believes there will always be industry disruption, giving historic examples, like the jet era, deregulation, low-cost carriers, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and now Covid-19.

“It’s only the type of disruption that is coming that we do not know,” Woldemariam said. “We have to be ready for change. We have to be very agile in our structure, to move from one thing to another. That’s what I suggest to our fellow African airlines.”

It is much easier to build agility as part of a team, in a well-equipped training ground. Woldemariam called for greater airline cooperation, supported by African Union initiatives, such as the African continental free trade area (AfCFTA) and the single African air transport market (SAATM).

However, SAATM, in itself, is yet another African marathon. Some 44 African Union countries agreed to liberalise their air links in 1999, under the Yamoussoukro Decision (YD).

This became legally binding in 2002, yet restrictions still remain, leading to the SAATM initiative in 2018.

Conference delegates heard that Zambia has become the most recent country to recommit to YD under SAATM. This takes the total number of SAATM states to 35 – but still falls well short of the 44 original YD signatories.

“Our advocacy programme obviously suffered a setback last year [because of Covid],” said Angeline Simana, African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC) director of air transport. “It’s like a marathon that never finishes, because our objective is to have all 54 states subscribe to SAATM.”

The African Development Bank (AfDB) is strongly supporting this SAATM push, because it has the potential to boost the continent’s air links, creating huge benefits for passengers, airlines and African countries.

“We still consider joining SAATM as a prerequisite for any financial support by the bank,” said AfDB chief aviation officer, Romain Ekoto.

In addition to incentivising SAATM, the AfDB





Esayas Woldemariam: “Biosafety is becoming the differentiator for the comfort of our customers – and for cost management.” PICTURE: AFFRA

is studying the creation of an aircraft leasing platform, to support smaller African carriers that struggle to finance new aircraft.

“We’re trying to come up with a solution that would de-risk leasing transactions for African airlines – and for the lessor – and, therefore, enable those airlines to access more modern and efficient aircraft, and aircraft parts, at a competitive market price,” Ekoto said.

This idea has been mooted for a few years, but consultants have now been appointed to identify the best solution to manage the financial risk. Discussions have already been held with airlines, lessors and financial partners, who will be invited to comment on the report findings and make sure that the end-solution will work in practice.

“The study will be completed by October. Therefore, very likely, we will have a consultation – either a workshop, or a meeting with the stakeholders – around September, to review deliverables, discuss and agree on the way



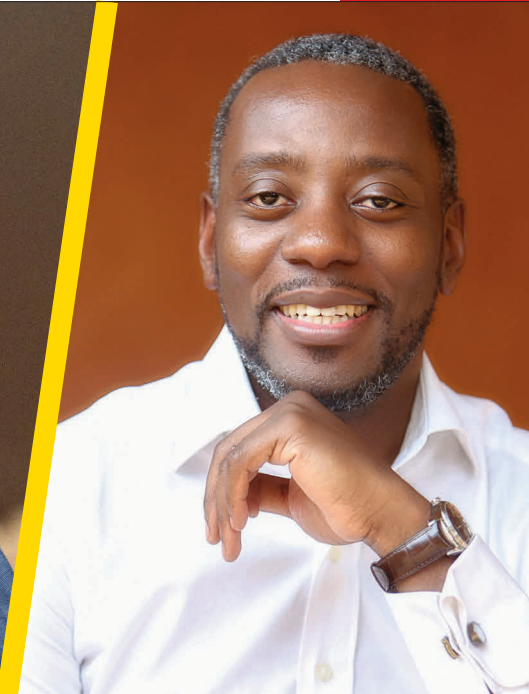
Raphael Kuuchi: “Since the beginning of 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic struck, at least eight African airlines have gone out of business...” PICTURE: BILLYPIX

forward,” Ekoto said. “Once we have the solution, then we’ll work on its implementation, with the bank as one of the main sponsors, but we really want to bring in the private sector, because this is a private sector-oriented initiative.”

Any performance boost is likely to be helpful. According to the latest International Air Transport Association (IATA) figures, African airlines are expected to post a \$7.8 billion loss for 2020 and African passenger numbers are only expected to reach 40% of 2019 levels in 2021.

“To succeed in the African market, you really need to be a master of survival,” Lufthansa Consulting associate partner, Matthias Kern, said.

Kern advised African airlines to take a good look at their business model, to identify a clear purpose and take an investor’s perspective when seeking financing. This view was echoed by several other speakers, along with the need for arm’s-length governance.



Romain Ekoto: “We still consider joining SAATM as a prerequisite for any financial support by the bank.” PICTURE: AFDB

The challenge here for Africa is that less than 2% of the continent’s population has actually been vaccinated at least once. For comparison, in Europe, it’s 30-40%. And in the US, it’s already at 50%.

So Africa may not reach herd immunity levels until sometime in 2023. And this results in a paradox. While globally, domestic markets are recovering much faster than international markets, it’s actually the other way around in Africa.

According to IATA regional VP for Africa and the Middle East, Kamil Al-Awadhi, more than 50 African governments have already reopened their borders to international flights, which is well ahead of other regions. However, this also means that many non-African markets remain closed.

Once again, this reiterates the need for intra-African cooperation. Perhaps the marathon is actually a relay race, where teamwork is needed to truly win. ■

ASTRAL SET TO DOUBLE FREIGHTER FLEET THIS YEAR

Kenyan all-cargo carrier, Astral Aviation, is poised to double its pre-Covid fleet by the end of 2021, taking it to 19 dedicated freighters, after a buoyant year for air cargo.

Before Covid, Astral operated 10 freighters: two Boeing 747-400Fs, three 727-200Fs, one McDonnell Douglas DC-9F, three Fokker 50s and a single Fokker 27.

However, business has boomed during the pandemic, prompting Astral to add a fourth 727-200F, plus two new types: a single 767-200F and a Bombardier CRJ-200PF.

“I believe that the biggest development will be the acquisition of additional Boeing 767-200 and -300 freighters,” Astral Aviation CEO, Sanjeev Gadhia, told delegates at the AFRAA conference.

Astral is already operating its first 767-200F. Another

was expected to join the fleet in mid-2021, sourced from Air Transport Services Group (ATSG), but this has been delayed because of a heavy maintenance check. The new delivery date is yet to be confirmed.

As of June 2021, Astral’s fleet totalled 13 freighters, but this will grow to 19 this year, with the delivery of six aircraft that were committed to in 2020.

The 2021 additions comprise a 757-200F from Jetexec in Dubai, a 727-200F from J&V Aviation and four British Aerospace ATPs from Encomm.

“We plan to phase out the Fokker 50 and Fokker 27 in 2022, hence the acquisition of the BAE ATP, making Astral the largest operator of the BAE ATP in Africa,” said Gadhia. “The ATP is a big project for us, as we see a

good possibility of more acquisitions in the near future.”

But the Nairobi carrier is not stopping there. In 2022, Astral will acquire another 767-200F and two 767-300Fs from ATSG – which leased the 767-200F to Astral earlier this year. Four 737-800Fs are also slated to arrive in 2022, replacing the 727-200Fs.

“In 2022, we will be operating two Boeing 767-300 freighters, so we have a very well packed-out freighter acquisition strategy,” Gadhia said.

“No other African airline has got the fleet that we have – and also the diversity of fleet. Our smallest aircraft can carry five tonnes and our largest can take 110 tonnes,” Gadhia said. “This fleet diversity is very important for our growth.” ■

Kamil Al Awadhi has taken up the reins as vice president, Africa and Middle East, for the International Air Transport Association (IATA). He now plans to help steer airline recovery in the region, as he explained to Alan Peaford.

As the former chief executive of Kuwait Airways, Kamil Al Awadhi knows the feeling of shock and bewilderment that hit the aviation industry when Covid struck with a vengeance last year.

“We had nothing, no references, documents, or standard operating procedures to fall back on, so we had to create our own,” Al Awadhi recalled.

Kuwait was one of the first countries to lock down. “If you look at some of the pictures from then, we had our crew operating in these white suits from head to toe, and they looked like they were doing spacewalks. Nobody knew what Covid was, or how infectious it was. So it was a horrendous time.”

A year later and Al Awadhi is taking his experience and his empathy to his IATA role. Speaking from the association’s regional headquarters in Amman, he said Africa and the Middle East had been harder hit than most.

“I like what IATA’s new CEO, Willie Walsh, said – it wasn’t the airlines that stopped flying, it was the governments and authorities within each state,” he explained.

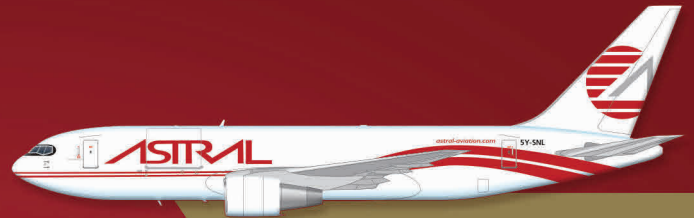
Continued
on Page 25



“My top priority is getting the stakeholders in each state to meet internally and accept a standard that will be applied within the region, and, hopefully, then globally.”

KAMIL AL AWADHI

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✈ LIVINGSTONE

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

“My personal take on this is, yes, the EMEA region, the Middle East and Africa region, got hit harder. I think it was a simple reaction by individual states, without consulting anybody else, taking decisions out of fear for their populations. The consequence is massive damage to the aviation industry.

“You have to consider that airlines are cutting costs tremendously. It was one of the things I started doing in May of last year. And, of course, you know the quickest solution is to lay off staff. That’s unfortunate, but they [the airlines] are improving efficiencies, and so forth.

“One of the things that you have in front of you, day in and day out, is how much cash you have left.

“Of course, this pandemic also caused mistrust with handling agents and other companies etc. So, a lot of companies started asking for cash up front because they needed the money too. There was none of this IATA clearing house, or ‘we’ll send you the bill on the end of the month’.

“So that means that, as an airline, you need to have that cash in your hand.

“Subsequently, you don’t operate a flight if you’re going to lose on it because you can’t afford to do it anymore. You’re not building up a route, you’re trying to survive at this point. And so, immediately, the consequence is the price of tickets goes straight up.”



In his new role, Al Awadhi will be addressing governments across the region to try to find a balance between health concerns and the industry revival.

“As a CEO, I was frustrated at governments not talking,” he said. “It could be a state government not talking internally with its stakeholders – all stakeholders, and there are many, a lot more than most people think. And then, subsequent to that, I was frustrated that one state was not talking to another state.”

Al Awadhi cites examples of aircraft, with passengers on board, being halted because the destination state had changed flight filing rules. He has taken that experience to his new job.

“I’m still bleeding from my experience,” he said. “I want to use it to avoid airlines suffering even further because of the disconnects that are happening within a state and between states. That’s my focal point.

“I need to get the states to accept a standard that gets applied by them all. There’s no point, if a flight is from A to B, if A is sorted out yet B isn’t. That flight is not going to happen.”

IATA, along with partners like the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the World Health Organization, is working to get a common travel pass on a mobile app that can be used by passengers to obtain and store their Covid-19 test results from accredited laboratories and vaccine records.



PICTURE: KUWAIT AIRWAYS

“The EMEA region, the Middle East and Africa region, got hit harder. I think it was a simple reaction by individual states, without consulting anybody else, taking decisions out of fear for their populations. The consequence is massive damage to the aviation industry.”

KAMIL AL AWADHI

But, although some major airlines are testing an IATA system, there are still barriers.

“The only way you’re going to get everybody on board is by having them all on the same platform. The disconnect remains massive within this region. My top priority, now, is getting the stakeholders in each state to meet internally and accept a standard that will be applied within the region, and, hopefully, then globally,” he said.

Al Awadhi said that IATA member airlines – and many non-member airlines – had expressed interest in installing the travel pass into their booking systems.

Aside from Covid, IATA in Africa and the Middle East has other issues to challenge the new regional vice president. Key among these is blocked funds.

Some states – particularly in Africa – have held on to payments made in a local currency that should have been repatriated to the airline.

“When Covid hit us and we’re consuming cash, we’re burning through it; every airline can calculate per minute [how much it is losing] while it’s on the ground. So, the first immediate thing is to look for all your money, bring it in from all the outstations – every airline has bank accounts at outstations for things like sales. You literally need to build cash,” Al Awadhi explained.



“So, blocked funds in Africa is a big number. These funds are owed to airlines, yet we hear of some carriers that have had to go to a bank and take a loan with a high interest to get cash. Yet, they actually have cash being locked up in a state in Africa. They end up paying interest on the cash that they already have in Africa.

“There is no excuse for blocking funds. African states should really consider releasing the money because it can affect their own airlines. It may also cause an airline that was actually a lifeline for their own state to go out of business. They then lose that lifeline. This should be addressed with urgency,” said Al Awadhi.

An engineer by background, Al Awadhi “jumped at the chance” to join his national airline. “Aviation was the ultimate of avionics, electronics, mechanics, engines and so on,” he said.

His career took him through the maintenance side and on to a master’s degree in aerospace at Toulouse before, in 2013, moving into safety management by heading up Kuwait Airways’ operational safety and emergency response team. In 2015, he became chief operating officer, then deputy CEO the following year. He became CEO in 2018.

He believes that there will be a return to “some kind of normality” by 2023, when airlines will be able to continue their work in achieving sustainability goals.

“Sustainability is going to be an issue for every CEO of every airline. And this is where governments can help,” he said. “They don’t have to provide cash, but they can support with government loans at very low interest rates. They can remove the taxes, they can move tariffs, and so forth. This reduces the cash burn and the daily operating cost of an airline.

“Even though the airlines are definitely becoming far more efficient in their operations today, the cash position has to be resolved.”

UN NOUVEL ÉLAN POUR

*Air Côte d'Ivoire a traversé une période difficile face à la crise du Covid-19 comme l'ensemble des compagnies aériennes au niveau mondial. Le nouveau directeur général de la compagnie a partagé les principaux éléments de son nouveau « business plan » 2021-2026 avec **Vincent Chappard**.*

Air Côte d'Ivoire est aujourd'hui paré pour la reprise. C'est Laurent Loukou, le nouveau directeur général, qui la pilotera. Il connaît bien la compagnie puisqu'il a assumé la fonction de directeur général adjoint auprès de René Décurey, qui la dirigeait depuis sa création en 2012.

En 2019, avant la pandémie, Air Côte d'Ivoire poursuivait son développement pour atteindre un équilibre financier, assurer sa stabilité et consolider son rôle de catalyseur du hub d'Abidjan. Elle avait transporté 761000 passagers pour un chiffre d'affaires d'environ 127 millions d'euros (83 milliards de FCFA). La compagnie nationale ivoirienne était en effet « le leader du transport aérien en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre avec 54% de part de marché. Elle acheminait 46% de trafic à l'aéroport d'Abidjan, permettant à l'ensemble des acteurs du transport aérien (aéroport, handling, fret et catering) et à l'économie du pays de prospérer.

Air Côte d'Ivoire a dû prendre des mesures drastiques face à la crise du Covid-19 pour réduire ses coûts avec notamment la suppression de sa route vers

Freetown. Elle a cumulé d'importantes pertes de l'ordre de 73 millions d'euros (48 milliards FCFA) sur la période 2020-2021.

« Nous prévoyons pour cette année 2021, un niveau de recouvrement de 80% de notre flotte (10 avions), 65% de notre programme de vols, 64% de notre chiffre d'affaires et 62% du volume de nos passagers », soutient Laurent Loukou. « Le marché ne retrouvera son niveau d'avant Covid-19 que vers 2024. Nous devons d'ici là faire preuve de résilience. »

À noter qu'Air Côte d'Ivoire compte également sur une aide plus importante de l'État ivoirien pour mieux contenir les effets de la crise.

La compagnie ivoirienne ne compte pourtant pas renoncer à sa stratégie d'expansion. Le chef de l'État Alassane Ouattara a, en effet, validé son nouveau « business plan » 2021-2026. Il prévoit notamment un déploiement de sa flotte sur le long-courrier à partir de 2023. Concernant le marché régional, il existe des leviers de croissance malgré son niveau de maturité.



« Il nous faut envisager de nouvelles routes pour cette année 2021 », poursuit Laurent Loukou. « Nous prévoyons l'ouverture de la ligne Abidjan-Johannesburg si les conditions sanitaires le permettent. Nous ouvrirons progressivement des lignes intercontinentales vers l'Europe, le Moyen-Orient et les USA à partir de 2023. »

Air Côte d'Ivoire a étoffé sa flotte avec la livraison, en février dernier, de son premier A320neo. Il va opérer sur son réseau régional (Cameroun, Gabon, Sénégal et plus tard l'Afrique du Sud).

Les principaux challenges pour Air Côte d'Ivoire sont : faire preuve de résilience face à la crise et atteindre la rentabilité. Le plan de compétitivité, déjà mis en place en 2019, devrait aider la compagnie à baisser ses coûts de production sur la plateforme aéroportuaire d'Abidjan.

La compagnie ivoirienne compte aussi nouer des partenariats. Des discussions ont ainsi été entamées avec Qatar Airways. Les premiers vols depuis Doha à destination d'Abidjan sont d'ailleurs prévus à partir de la mi-juin. Cette ouverture via la compagnie qatarie contribuera à diversifier l'offre de la desserte sur le Moyen-Orient, voire l'Asie. Air Côte d'Ivoire demeure également ouverte à des partenariats avec les autres compagnies de la région.

PICTURE : AIR CÔTE D'IVOIRE

« Il nous faut envisager de nouvelles routes pour cette année 2021. »

LAURENT LOUKOU

AIR CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Par ailleurs, Air Côte d'Ivoire continue à développer ses capacités en matière de formation et de la MRO.

L'Institut National Polytechnique Félix Houphouët Boigny de Yamoussoukro accueillera prochainement une école de formation aéronautique. Elle est le fruit de la volonté d'Air Côte d'Ivoire, de la Banque africaine de développement (BAD) et de la SODEXAM. Cette école spécialisée positionnera la Côte d'Ivoire comme un pôle de formation pour la région.

Côté MRO, la compagnie ivoirienne a réalisé la première opération « Check-C » sur l'un de ses A320 dans son centre d'Abidjan. Il s'agit de consolider ses assises avec Airbus Consulting en vue d'être un partenaire MRO pour la flotte d'Airbus.

Air Côte d'Ivoire compte résolument renforcer son statut de compagnie majeure de la région en connectant l'Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre au reste du monde dans les meilleurs standards de qualité et de sécurité. ■

SUMMARY

Air Côte d'Ivoire starts Covid fightback

Air Côte d'Ivoire has gone through a difficult period during the Covid-19 crisis. Newly appointed CEO, Laurent Loukou, has outlined his intentions to Vincent Chappard.

Until 2019, pre-pandemic, Air Côte d'Ivoire continued to balance its books, ensuring stability.

It had consolidated its leading role in the Abidjan hub, through which it had carried 761,000 passengers for a turnover of around €127 million (\$154m).

But Covid-19 meant that Air Côte d'Ivoire had to take drastic cost-reduction steps, specifically by grounding its key route to Freetown. Subsequently it recorded significant losses of around €73 million (\$88.5m) over the period 2020-2021.

Loukou said: "For 2021, we anticipate flying 80% of our fleet of 10 aircraft; completing 65% of our flight programme. We believe we will be working on about 64% of our turnover and 62% of passenger volumes.

"We estimate that the market won't return to its pre-pandemic level until around 2024 so, until then, we need to be resilient."

The airline is also counting on more state aid to help

contain the effects of the crisis. Head-of-state, Alassane Ouattara, has endorsed Loukou's plans, which include deploying the airline's long-haul fleet from 2023.

"We must consider new routes this year," continued Loukou. "We plan to open up Abidjan to Johannesburg as soon as Covid conditions allow."

The airline has expanded its fleet with February's delivery of its first A320neo, which will operate regional flights to Cameroon, Gabon, Senegal and, later, South Africa.

The company also intends to forge partnerships, and discussions have begun with Qatar Airways, with the first flights from Doha to Abidjan being scheduled as African Aerospace was going to press.

On the MRO side, the company has carried out the first C-check on one of its A320s. It is consolidating its relationship with Airbus Consulting in order to be an MRO partner for the Airbus fleet. ■



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Your instructor Philippe Carous works from his Brussels office from where he provides legal advice to the aerospace, transport and security industry. His areas of expertise includes international aviation law (ICAO), contractual law, the international liability of the air carrier, European Union law (EASA) and 'drones'.



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New to market: An artist's impression of the 10X, which will enter service in 2025.

IMAGE: DASSAULT.



Introducing the 'perfect 10'

The latest business jet launch completes a triple top for the ultimate private aircraft category.

Alan Peaford explains why this is good news for VIPs.

VIPs have always had an eye for the very best when it comes to private jets. The sector that draws the most admiring looks is the ultra-long-range category with its jets offering large, wide, cabins, fast speeds and amazing comfort.

Bombardier had already been first-to-market with its Global 7500 now in service. Gulfstream is set to bring its G700 into service next year – and now Dassault Aviation has entered the fray with the unveiling of the Falcon 10X.

It has been a busy time for the French firm. In April, the Falcon 6X made its first flight and heralded the start of its test programme and, a month later, CEO, Eric Trappier, revealed the 10X.

Due to enter service in 2025, the Falcon 10X is powered by two Rolls-Royce Pearl engines, will have a 7,500nm range and a cabin cross-section larger than some regional jets. Certainly, it appears to have the most spacious cabin of any purpose-built business jet.

The range of all three of these ultra-large ultra-long-range jets will get the VIP or corporate giants anywhere in the world in a single hop. Certainly from Paris, where the reveal took place, you could fly non-stop to west coast Australia, Anchorage, Chile or Tokyo. And it will be in amazing comfort.

The 10X is a clean-sheet design with a new wing, will fly at 51,000 feet at Mach 0.925, just short of the speed of sound. So what does \$75 million dollars get you?

The 10X has a cabin height of 2.03 metres and a width of 2.77 metres that will make it almost 20cm wider and 2 inches (5cm) taller than the widest and tallest purpose-built business jet flying today, according to Dassault's executive vice president, Carlos Brana, who explained how size really does matter.

"The standard configuration of the aircraft is provided with a four-lounge cabin," he said. "But just by moving the dividers you can either shrink or extend the length of the cabins, so you can even cancel one room. It all depends on the needs of the customers and, of course, we will adapt to what better fits their needs."

From a range of bedroom options and en-suite bathrooms, through to a love-seat dining option and, importantly, seats that you can get in and out of without disturbing your fellow passengers, the space really works.

Dassault has also thought about the men or women at the front on those long-haul flights, offering a reclining seat to give the non-flying pilot a useful rest space during the cruise.

The technology – much of it derived from the Rafale fighter jet – includes a single lever throttle and, for the first time in civil aviation, the pilots can simply

press a button if they are disoriented or in case of wake turbulence, and the aircraft will automatically recover to a safe attitude and speed.

Rolls-Royce gets its first outing on a Dassault business jet and its Pearl 10X will deliver 18,000 pounds of thrust.

It has also been designed to fly on 100% sustainable jet fuel.

The previous Dassault flagship, the 7X, proved popular. Now, with this extra space, extra speed and extra range, it is no surprise that this latest contender is already being dubbed "The perfect 10".

The competition will be tough. But, already, analysts are predicting that with the three major players bringing new aircraft to market, this will stimulate the interest and that all three OEMs will succeed. ■



Luxurious: The 10X will allow for a queen size bed and an en suite bathroom. PICTURE: DASSAULT.



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Dawit Lemma: “The pandemic gave us a lot of experience with handling medical flights.”

Left: Dawit Lemma and his team explore their options.

PICTURES: KRIMSON

Aeromedical puts Krimson in the pink

Since the start of the pandemic, business aviation in Ethiopia, and Africa as a whole, has been quiet. However, as Dawit Lemma, founder of Krimson Aviation, tells Marcelle Nethersole, things are changing for his company.

Dawit Lemma, CEO of Ethiopia-based Krimson Aviation, had a bit of a panic when the country went into lockdown in March 2020.

“I had to close the office, with only essential staff going in. It was only natural to panic those first couple of weeks, as aviation and tourism were the top two industries to be affected by the pandemic – and this was my business,” said Lemma.

However, he took a breath and grasped the opportunity to “sit back at home and make a plan”.

“I was in my home office with sweatpants and a hoodie on, with a lamp in the dark, thinking ‘how can we stay alive as a company?’”

He had no need to worry, as 2020 turned out to be “the best operational year” in terms of flight numbers that Krimson has ever achieved.

Based at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport, the aviation services business is established in 12 African countries. It provides flight support, charter and leasing brokerage, as well as MRO solutions tailored to aircraft on ground (AOG) issues, plus consulting services, all tailored to business aviation, ad hoc non-scheduled services, humanitarian and medivac segments.

It was its aeromedical division that Lemma focused on during those days at home.

“We’ve been supporting third-party aeromedical service providers in Ethiopia and the region for about four years now,” he explained. “We provide the ground-handling required, plus established protocols for medical evacuations in Ethiopia with the Civil Aviation Authority.

“The pandemic gave us a lot of experience with handling

medical flights, especially Covid patients. And, with our enhanced capabilities, we saw a lot of repatriation flights come through. Being based at Bole, along with Ethiopian Airlines, Africa’s largest airline, we were receiving all types of aircraft – from Caravans to Dreamliners.”

Krimson also partnered up with two of the largest hospitals in Ethiopia, which account for around 90% of the medical evacuations within the country.

The company is now looking at air medical as a stand-alone focused business unit, developing its own specialist ground team dedicated to the sector.

The company is just six years old, but has already made a big impact on business and private aviation in both Ethiopia and Africa as a whole.

Lemma said the company has a focus on “developing the business aviation market, or at least the understanding of it”, in the region.

“There’s a misunderstanding between commercial aviation and business aviation,” he explained. “Everybody believes that, because aircraft have wings, they all operate at the same service level. This is obviously not the case.



“Our current focus is to make sure that business aviation aircraft or ad hoc flights, be they humanitarian or medevac, are getting the services they require. Because what you’re seeing across the continent is the same handling agent managing or providing services for the larger triple seven commercial flights, and then an hour later to a Cessna Caravan or to a G5.

“What we’re focusing on currently is expanding our footprint in the ground-handling realm.”

The company has agents and representatives from Egypt, down to Mozambique, and as far west as the Central African Republic.

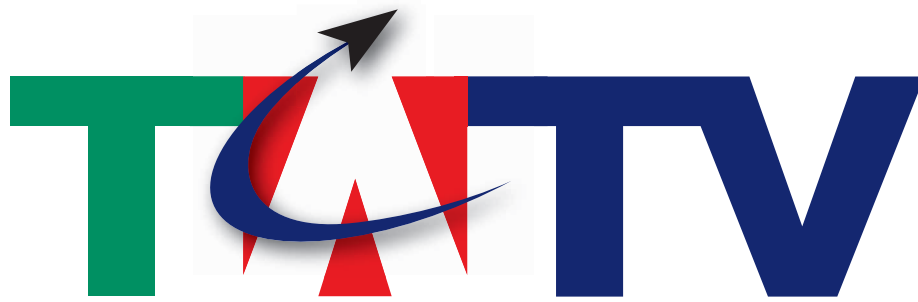
Lemma revealed the company is looking to establish a fixed-base operation (FBO) at Addis Ababa Bole, with a focus on maintenance for smaller aircraft.

“An FBO is much needed,” said Lemma. “Ethiopian Airlines has a phenomenal MRO, but it’s tailored to the airline industry. We need more focus on business and general aviation.”

When it comes to branching out in other African countries, Lemma admitted: “Of course there are obstacles. There are 54 countries in Africa; that means there’s 54 set of rules, where some countries have more understanding and flexibility than others.

“The three major challenges we have is perception, followed by bureaucracy, and finance.”

For now though, Lemma is gearing up to aviation in Ethiopia opening up entirely, ditching his sweat pants, getting back into a suit, and looking forward to achieving his goals. ■



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BOTSWANA BOOSTS POLICE HELICOPTER CAPABILITY

Botswana's police force has acquired increased capabilities in fighting everything from burglars to wild game poachers with a new batch of rotary-wing equipment. Alan Dron reports.

The Botswana Police Service (BPS) has stepped up its aerial capabilities with the acquisition of three Enstrom 480B light utility helicopters.

The third and final helicopter of the batch was delivered earlier this year. All three are now in service, supplementing an existing fleet that includes Aerospatiale A350 Ecureuils.

The US-built helicopters were ordered in January 2020 and supplied via South Africa's Safomar Aviation, Enstrom's agent for most of Africa, particularly south of the equator.

A lengthy tendering and acquisition process, analysing several types of aircraft, was undertaken before the BPS settled on the Enstrom 480B.

According to Shai Shalem, Safomar Aviation's managing director, the aircraft are being used in several roles including crime prevention, border patrol and wildlife conservation.

The aircraft's ability to carry out these roles was aided by both its quietness and its four-and-a-half-hour endurance, he added.

Shalem said that the BPS had not made public the factors that led them to choose the Enstrom, but he noted that the 480 was originally designed to meet US Army requirements for a light training helicopter – and



Delivery complete: Three Enstrom 480Bs are now in service with the Botswana Police Service.

PICTURES: SAFOMAR AVIATION



actually exceeded them.

Among qualities he suspected may have played a role in the decision was the Enstrom's fully articulated three-bladed main rotor, which made for smooth, quiet, flight; its low centre of gravity, due to the Rolls-Royce 250-C20W turbine's position in the engine compartment; and its sturdy undercarriage.

The three aircraft have been outfitted with a wide range of specialised equipment for the policing role, including a Trakka Systems day/night camera and

searchlight, Safe Flight powerline detection system – electric power lines are a major hazard to helicopters at low altitude – and a public address system.

One person can also change the cabin interior between a three- and five-person layout in minutes, adding to the helicopters' versatility, he added.

Safomar Group also trained the seven pilots and six engineers, who will staff the new helicopters.

"All the pilots had thousands of hours of helicopter experience, so they came for a conversion course and spent a week [here]," said Shalem.

While the engineers will be able to handle routine maintenance on the Enstroms, Safomar will provide technical support, notably if the aircraft require future upgrading or modification. ■

AFRICAN 'FIRST' AS CAVERTON OPERATES THE HELIBUS

The first Sikorsky S-92 Helibus to be operated by a wholly locally owned African company is now working in Nigeria, writes Jon Lake.

Although Bristow Helicopters has operated S-92s in the west African country for some years, Caverton Helicopters is the first African operator to fly the Sikorsky S-92 Helibus. The aircraft has been leased to Lagos-based Caverton by the Milestone Aviation Group, part of the GE Capital Aviation Services (GECAS) portfolio. Milestone already leases three AW139s and two S-76C++ helicopters to Caverton.

Michael York, Milestone's head of emerging markets, said: "The S-92 continues to be the workhorse of the offshore sector and, through this transaction, we are not only cultivating a new operator for this aircraft type but also expanding its footprint, which is critical for the industry."

Previously N299VT on the US civil register, the helicopter was parked up and waiting for a suitable lessor, having been successively owned by the Wells Fargo Bank Northwest NA, and then by the Bank of Utah.

Unusually, the helicopter was shipped into the



A new home: 5N-LEE at the Caverton maintenance facility in Lagos. PICTURE: CAVERTON HELICOPTERS

Nigerian Port Authority's Tin Can Island Port (TCIP) in Lagos on board the Grimaldi Group ship, *Grande Marocco*, with other components arriving separately. The aircraft had the local registration 5N-LEE applied after arriving in Nigeria.

Instead of being transported out by road for a first in-country flight from an airport, 5N-LEE was assembled and flown from inside the Port and Terminal Multi-Services Limited (PTML) terminal, after obtaining the necessary approvals from the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) and the Nigerian Ports Authority.

The airframe and all the imported components were brought together and assembled within the terminal by a team from Caverton, led by chief engineer Sani Amodu.

Caverton will use the helicopter to support an offshore crew change contract.

However, MD, Rotimi Makanjuola, said that the S-92 would also "enable the company to expand into service provision for clients that require additional payload and extended range for their missions, which the S-92 efficiently and safely provides". ■

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Photographic record made by the Brazilian Air Force on one of the missions to combat COVID-19 in Brazil.



Plenty of action: Nigeria's Alpha Jets have seen heavy use in the fight against Boko Haram.

PICTURE: NIGERIAN AIR FORCE HQ



On their way: The Nigerian Air Force will soon receive 12 Embraer A-29s, built in Florida by Sierra Nevada.

PICTURE: EMBRAER



Home grown: Africa's indigenous light-attack aircraft, the Mvari, previously known as Ahrlac, and now being promoted to the US as the Bronco II.

PICTURE: PARAMOUNT



Deadly: A South African Hawk carrying the Denel Dynamics Umbani glide bomb, now built under licence in the UAE as the Al Tariq.

PICTURE: SAAF

Time for Africa to switch on the lights

Jon Lake *assesses the light-attack aircraft situation on the continent.*

Since the end of the Cold War, most of the world's air forces have not had to operate in heavily contested environments, nor have they had to face advanced military opponents with sophisticated integrated air defence systems.

Instead, the emphasis has been on asymmetric warfare against irregular and insurgent opponents.

And, yet, these counter-insurgency operations have frequently been undertaken using unsuitable aircraft and weapons, air power tools developed and optimised for very different requirements.

Fast-jets are poorly suited for counter-insurgency work, and may be prohibitively expensive. Yet, dedicated light-attack aircraft, which are optimised for this kind of warfare,

have struggled to gain significant market penetration.

Though many African air forces have prioritised the procurement of fast-jet fighters, some have found themselves, either as a result of smart procurement practices, or because of historical accident or budgetary need, to have far more useful equipment.

Unable to afford the procurement and/or operating costs of modern fast-jets, some African air forces have bought armed trainers or light-attack aircraft in their place, while others are operating these aircraft as a result of long past procurement decisions.

In a few cases, air forces have sensibly assessed their operational requirements and purchased accordingly!

With its extensive combat experience – first in

Liberia as part of the Economic Community of West African States monitoring group (ECOMOG) peace-keeping force, and then in the long war against Boko Haram, the Nigerian Air Force soon found that its frontline fast-jet fighters were much less useful for close air support than its Aero L-39 and Dassault Alpha Jet advanced trainers.

The latter have formed the backbone of Nigeria's air campaign against the Islamist insurgent group, while the type has also been used operationally by Cameroon, Egypt, Morocco and Togo.

The L-39 is in service with a number of African nations – as a trainer in Algeria, Angola, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea and Mozambique, and with a ground-

Continued
on Page 36

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attack capability in Libya, Nigeria, South Sudan, Tunisia, and Uganda.

Aero Vodochody sees potential for further sales, and is actively marketing the modernised and upgraded L-39NG variant, which is powered by a Williams FJ44 engine, and which features an improved fuel system and modern avionics.

Other jet light-attack aircraft include small numbers of Aermacchi MB326s, for example in Togo and Tunisia, while the Cameroon Air Force operates six ex-SAAF Atlas Impala Mk I and IIs.

Kenya retired its BAE Hawk Mk52s nearly 10 years ago, but the type remains active in South Africa, where the Hawk 120s of No85 Combat Flying School at AFB Makhado have a secondary frontline commitment.

China's increasing influence may be seen in the number of air forces using the Hongdu JL-8 (Nanchang JL-8, also known as the Karakorum-8 or K-8). Some use the type purely as an advanced trainer, while others (including Ghana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe) exploit the type's weapons capabilities.

But, as in the rest of the world, it is turboprop aircraft (and usually derivatives of turboprop-powered basic trainers) that provide the bulk of Africa's dedicated light-attack aircraft. The Embraer EMB-314 A-29 Super Tucano has dominated the market thus far.

Three were delivered to the Burkina Faso Air Force in September 2011, and four to the Mauritanian Air Force from December 2012.

Six more went to the National Air Force of Angola from January 2013, while four were delivered to the Mali Air Force in July 2018.

An order for five aircraft from the Ghana Air

Force was placed in 2015, but these do not seem to have entered service.

All of these aircraft were manufactured by Embraer in Brazil, but the company has also set up a production line in Florida in conjunction with its partner, the Sierra Nevada Corporation, for the manufacture of A-29s for the US and US clients. The 12 aircraft on order for the Nigerian Air Force will come from this line.

Senegal entered negotiations with Embraer for the purchase of several Super Tucanos, but the deal was never finalised and Senegal opted for four Korean KAI KT-1s instead.

The Senegalese aircraft is an armed export variant, locally designated as the KA-1S. These were delivered from May 2020, and will be augmented by four armed versions of the L-39NG.



Senegal has been without a fixed-wing combat aircraft since the retirement of its Fouga Magister light-attack aircraft, relying on armed Mi-171Sh and Mi-24/35 helicopters.

In February 2020, the US State Department approved a possible foreign military sale (FMS) of four AT-6C Wolverine light-attack aircraft to Tunisia, adding to an earlier approval for up to 12 unarmed T-6C Texan trainers. If finalised, this would represent the first export sale for the Wolverine – Textron's competitor to the Super Tucano in the light-attack aircraft market.

In recent years, the US Air Force has undertaken a series of evaluations of light-attack aircraft, but attempts to establish an acquisition programme for itself have been unsuccessful.

The light air support (LAS) requirement did result in the procurement of 20 Embraer/SNC A-29 Super Tucano aircraft, but these were used only to train Afghan personnel, before being handed over to the Afghan Air Force.

The USAF has bought three Super Tucanos to support Air Force Special Operations Command's (AFSOC's) combat aviation advisor (CAA) mission, and two AT-6E Wolverines for the 'continued light-attack experiment' and to support development of the new low-cost airborne extensible relay over-horizon network (AEROnet) datalink architecture.

The US is now undertaking an armed overwatch flight demonstration programme, evaluating potential solutions to a special operations command (SOCOM) requirement.

As *African Aerospace* was going to press, five competing aircraft were each scheduled to fly four demonstration flights at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida between June 14 and July 23. The 'winner' could then be asked to provide a proposal for the production of 75 aircraft for SOCOM.

The competitors include the Textron Aviation Defence AT-6E Wolverine, the L3 AT-802U Sky Warden, MAG Aerospace's MC-208 Guardian, the PZL/Sierra Nevada Corporation MC-145B Wily Coyote, and the Leidos Bronco II – an Americanised derivative of the South African Paramount/Aerosud advanced high-performance reconnaissance light aircraft (Ahrlac).

Any US acquisition would give the winning aircraft a massive advantage on the export market – not least in Africa. ■

TUNISIA EYES UP LATEST WOLVERINE

Tunisia was watching closely as the United States Air Force (USAF) quietly received the first of two Beechcraft AT-6E (Wolverine) light attack aircraft.

Following the low-key ceremony formally recognising that handover in Wichita, Kansas, in February, the USAF and Textron Aviation Defense will now be working together over the next six months to obtain airworthiness certifications for the AT-6E.

Once it has a US military type certificate, it will then be available for export under the direct commercial sales process, or via the foreign military sales (FMS) procedure.



Both Tunisia and Thailand have received congressional approval to acquire the type, and other nations are also understood to be interested in the AT-6E.

The US State Department approved a potential sale of 12 T-6 Texan trainer aircraft to Tunisia in October 2019, and added an approval for four AT-6C Wolverines on February 27 2020.

The USAF, itself, has currently no plans to acquire more than two aircraft, which will be used to support Air Combat Command's (ACC) continued light attack experiment (CLAE), exploring the use of such aircraft in countering violent extremist organisations (C-VEO),



Approved for sale: Tunisia has received congressional approval to acquire the Wolverine.

PICTURE: TEXTRON.

developing operational tactics, and drawing up standards for exportable, tactical data-sharing networks.

The Wolverine is an armed derivative of the Beechcraft T-6B Texan, optimised for primary weapons training or light attack roles. The T-6 Texan (also known as the Model 3000) is, itself, a US-built derivative of the Pilatus PC-9, extensively modified by Beechcraft to meet the US joint primary aircraft training system (JPATS) requirement in the 1990s.

The aircraft has been built in a number of versions, including the T-6A Texan II for the USAF, US Navy, and

Hellenic Air Force, and the armed T-6A NTA with rocket pods, gun pods, and external fuel tanks, for the Hellenic Air Force.

The T-6B for the US Navy incorporated a digital glass cockpit including a head-up display (HUD), six multi-function displays, and hands on throttle and stick (HOTAS) technology, while the T-6C was an upgraded version of the T-6B with underwing hard points, primarily designed for export.

The type has been exported to 11 nations, including Iraq, Israel and Morocco. ■

SUDAN-EGYPT PACT TO FOIL ETHIOPIA DAM PLAN

Military cooperation and relations have steadily improved between Sudan and Egypt since the removal of former Sudanese president, Omar al-Bashir, writes *Jon Lake*.

The two nations have found common cause in opposing Ethiopian plans for a new hydroelectric dam – the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam – on the Blue Nile, which could disrupt their own water supplies.

Joint military cooperation began in November 2019 with the first 'Nile Eagles' exercise – sometimes pointedly referred to as 'Guardians of the Nile'.

A second iteration of this exercise, unimaginatively dubbed 'Nile Eagles 2' was mounted earlier this year.

The exercise was conducted at Sudan's Meroe Air Base and was primarily aimed at improving the ability of the Egyptian and Sudanese air forces to carry out joint air operations, though special forces troops from both nations were also involved.

Egypt deployed MiG-29M2 fighters, supported by an Airbus C295, while Sudanese participation involved the six Guizhou FTC-2000 advanced trainers, delivered in 2018, as well as Sukhoi Su-24 'Fencer' and Su-25 'Frogfoot' ground-attack aircraft, and Mi-17 'Hip' and Mi-24 'Hind' helicopters. These flew both offensive



Working together: MiG-29M2s in formation with FTC-2000 Nile Eagles.

PICTURES: EGYPTIAN ARMED FORCES.

and defensive sorties and combat search-and-rescue (CSAR) missions.

The exercise was held against a backdrop of escalating and warlike rhetoric from both countries about Ethiopia's intransigence, which was blamed for the breakdown of talks about the dam project. ■

NAF HIT BY ANOTHER FATAL CRASH

The Nigerian Air Force (NAF) has set up an urgent safety review after another fatal crash, writes *Erwan de Cherisey*.

On May 21, a NAF Beechcraft King Air 350i (NAF 203) transport aircraft crashed while attempting to land at Kaduna Airport on its way from Abuja.

The accident killed all four crew and seven passengers, including Lieutenant General Ibrahim Attahiru, Chief of Army Staff, who had been appointed to the position in January 2021.

According to local media reports, poor weather could have caused the tragedy.

NAF 203 is the second King Air 350i lost by the air force in recent weeks. A previous aircraft, NAF 201, which was configured for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, was destroyed in February while attempting to return to Abuja Airport following an engine failure.

The loss of NAF 203 leaves the air force with just two operational King Air 350is.

On March 31, a NAF Alpha Jet (NAF 475) disappeared during a combat sortie over Borno State in the north-east of the country.

Boko Haram claimed to have brought down the aircraft and released a video purporting to show footage of the crash. The claim has been dismissed by the NAF and it appears that the footage presented was actually lifted from a video of an aircraft shot down in Syria several years earlier. To date, the Alpha Jet and its crew have yet to be found.

On May 25, the NAF announced that it was setting up a committee to undertake a safety audit of its aircraft fleet. ■



Flexible transport: The Skytruck in US Air Force action.

PICTURE: USAF, TECH SGT SAMUEL KING JR

SKYTRUCK BOOST FOR THE KENYAN AIR FORCE

The Kenya Air Force (KAF) has received its first C-145A Skytruck transport aircraft writes *Jon Lake*.

The C-145A, known to the US Air Force as the Combat Coyote, is a variant of the PZL Mielec M28 Skytruck.

The USAF started retiring its fleet of 16 C-145A aircraft in May 2015, when the first aircraft was delivered to the 309th Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group at Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona.

Eleven of the 16 aircraft were stored in the desert boneyard by June 2015.

Kenya Air Force pilots and loadmasters travelled to

Hurlburt Field, Florida, in September 2019 to begin receiving training on the type from the USAF's 818th Mobility Support Advisory Squadron and 492nd Special Operations Wing.

Kenya's first C-145A was delivered via Moncton in New Brunswick (Canada), Keflavik (Iceland), Wick (Scotland), Antwerp (Belgium), and Valtursko Polje (Croatia).

The Skytruck can operate from short, unprepared, airstrips thanks to its high lift wing, low pressure tyres, and thrust-reversing propellers. It will replace the KAF's Harbin Y-12 transports. ■



Safety check: Two NAF Beechcraft King Air 350is have crashed recently. PICTURE NAF

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Nigeria is seeking to improve the performance of the country's airports by opening them up to private operators. But, asks Alan Dron, will the proposed move survive opposition from trade unions?



Already privately operated: Terminal 2 at Lagos's Murtala Mohammed International Airport.

PICTURE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Will public row prove terminal for private prospects?

The Nigerian Government has been trying to privatise its airports for more than four years. The move has been opposed by the country's trade unions and the parliamentary opposition, leading the government to water down its proposals by offering time-limited (although still lengthy) management concessions.

But the unions remain unconvinced and have threatened industrial action.

So, what are the chances that the plans will go ahead?

The government's initial stance was that private companies could not take on only the better airports, such as Lagos and Abuja, but also had to operate some of the less profitable sites and cross-subsidise them, explained Dr Pallavi Roy, senior lecturer in international economics at SOAS University of London.

Nigeria's major airports are a mixed lot, she added. Terminal 2 at Lagos's Murtala Mohammed International Airport is privately operated, while Abuja's Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, built relatively recently by China, is run by the government, and both are "fairly efficient".

However, Port Harcourt, in the Delta Region, "is not as efficient as it could be" due to longstanding security issues, and Kano, in the north of the country, "is just not commercially viable" because of Nigeria's economic uncertainty and ongoing problems in the shape of what is referred to in Nigeria as 'banditry' – namely kidnappings and looting.

The extent to which opposition from the country's trade unions will affect the privatisation process is uncertain. "In the 1970s and 1980s they were very effective, but they've lost some of their punch. They do threaten to strike once in a while," said the professor.

"There will certainly be restructuring. If it's well-organised, a privatised airport should have more retail

outlets, lounges and better ground-handling, but it may not be the sort of jobs the unions want."

However, she added, plans seemed to be on hold for the moment: "I don't think they are getting enough interest [from investors]."

"Generally, governments have moved out of running airports in the developing world, but they do maintain a stake in these concession agreements."

Naturally, an investor – particularly a foreign one – would want at least a 51% shareholding in order to have clear control of an airport's future direction.

She said she was uncertain as to whether airport privatisation would go ahead: "Given the doldrums the aviation sector finds itself in, I think it's going to be difficult for the Nigerian Government to present this as an enviable opportunity." ■

A STATE OF CONFUSION IN ASABA

One Nigerian airport that could, in future, be run under a concession agreement by the private sector is Asaba, in Delta State. But confusion surrounding the deal is all too typical of the state of Nigerian politics and the country's economy.

In February, the Delta State Government signed an agreement with a concessionaire, Asaba Airport Company (AAC), to run the airport for the next 30 years. As part of the deal, AAC will pay an initial sum of 1 billion naira (around \$2.4 million), together with a 100 million naira fee each year, with a 10% escalation every five years.

A state government press release went into considerable detail on how the airport's 'anchor airline' and MRO operator would be Air Peace, with a series of other companies undertaking responsibility for areas such as the airport's cargo and logistics centre, fuel provision and helicopter terminal.

The state government described AAC as a consortium consisting of Nigeria's First Investment Development Company (FIDC) and the UK's Menzies Aviation.

There is just one problem: according to UK-based Menzies Aviation, neither it, nor sister-company AHS-Menzies, have any involvement in the project.

All telephone numbers listed on the Delta State Government website were out of order and there was no reply to e-mail enquiries from *African Aerospace* attempting to clarify the situation. Attempts to contact FIDC met the same problems. ■

NEW ONDA BOSS FACING MAJOR CHALLENGES

King Mohammed VI appointed Habiba Laklalech as CEO of the Moroccan Airports Authority (ONDA) in February, at a time when Covid-19 was affecting airports everywhere. **Vincent Chappard** reports.

Habiba Laklalech undoubtedly faces a challenging task in helping Moroccan airports to stave off the Covid-19 crisis and set them on the path of recovery.

The former Royal Air Maroc (RAM) deputy CEO is now heading up airport infrastructure development, air navigation management, and security, for a network of 26 airports, including 19 international facilities across Morocco.

Her number one task is to come up with policy responses to the pandemic and prepare for a return to growth when the skies get clearer.

According to the latest forecast, after a record year in terms of air traffic in 2019, ONDA's turnover will drop drastically and its debt could reach a record high.

Yet, Morocco has been implementing an efficient development policy for decades to increase airport capacity, particularly at the start of 2019.

During that booming period, the country completed major state-of-the-art projects, including the extension and modernisation of Terminal 1 at Casablanca International Airport (2019), the construction of a new terminal at Fez Saïss (2017) and at Marrakech-Menara International Airport (2016). New terminals in Guelmim, Zagora and



Habiba Laklalech:
Preparing Moroccan airports for a return to growth.

PICTURE ONDA.

Errachidia airports also entered into service in 2019.

The new CEO will have to assess development projects currently under way, especially at Nador and Rabat airports.

Measures recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO), Airports Council International (ACI), the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which were implemented at Moroccan airports in mid-2020, have been rewarded. ONDA has certified eight airports under the ACI health accreditation programme (AHA), including Casablanca Mohammed V, Agadir Al-Massira, Oujda Angads, Marrakech-Menara, Rabat Salé, Tangier Ibn Battuta, Ouarzazate, and Fès Saïss.

Furthermore, ONDA and RAM have been heavily involved in the delivery of vaccines within the country since the launch of the vaccination campaign at the end of January.

By the end of May, Moroccan authorities had taken new measures to ease travel restrictions. Flights to and from Morocco resumed on June 15.

Laklalech's main challenge will be to ensure the revival of airport operations and air transport by capitalising on the summer season.

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*Nigerian Aviation Handling Company (NAHCO) CEO, Olatokunbo Fagbemi, has big plans for the company, as she explains to **Chukwu Emeke**.*

NAHCO moves back to the future

Olatokunbo Fagbemi:
"We would like to expand across west Africa. Any opportunity that comes and we are ready to take advantage."

PICTURE: NAHCO



Before Covid-19 struck, NAHCO, the oldest handling company in Nigeria, had ambitious plans to grow its business by up to 500%. Now, although those plans have been slowed by the pandemic, CEO, Olatokunbo Fagbemi, is bringing the strategy back on course.

"We will go back to that transformation plan. We believe we will get there; maybe not in five years because we are in a kind of reset, but we are still on that trajectory of growth," she said.

Fagbemi is proud to highlight the company's priorities and experience of triumphantly confronting the effects of the pandemic.

In mid-March last year, the Nigerian Government declared a total lockdown in response to the pandemic, which lasted for about three months.

□□□□□

Despite record revenue losses by airlines both during and after the lockdown, Nigeria's two major handling companies – NAHCO and Skyway Aviation Handling Company (SAHCO) – adapted to more freight handling.

"About 60% of our business before Covid was focused on passenger and aircraft handling. Though the decrease in passenger traffic has affected us and some of the airlines have not even come back on board, we have also adjusted to the reality of cargo in the cabin, which is a lot of what we are doing now," explained Fagbemi.

NAHCO employees have been proud to keep essential

supplies moving, especially medical supplies, personnel protective equipment and so on.

However, the work changes have not been without their challenges.

"On cargo, one of the problems we now face is the issue of social distancing in the warehouse," said Fagbemi. "For our staff, there is a way in which you carry a load on board when it is quite heavy or of a particular size. How much social distancing can be achieved while doing that?"

"So, given the nature of the business, we push as much as possible for people to wear their nose masks and wash their hands. It is also about sharing knowledge and getting people to understand that Covid is still real."

Fagbemi further highlighted other Covid19 challenges, like the sanitizing of aircraft in addition to cleaning. This put some pressure on the organisation, as management not only had to invest in extra chemicals, PPE, and training, but also contend with staff attitudinal change towards the wearing of masks and gloves.

"If you couple all this increase in cost and change in attitude, and combine it with a fall in industry revenue, I don't think we need say anything more about the industry's challenges in 2020," she said.

□□□□□

However, 2021 has brought with it new opportunities.

"The airline business is gradually picking up and we will also pick up and continue to grow," said the CEO.

"We would like to expand across west Africa. Any opportunity that comes and we are ready to take advantage. We will always keep our eyes open for opportunities in the region in the form of partnerships and collaboration.

"Gradually, we see ourselves coming out of darkness into light. We see a consistent sure path to recovery. We believe that, with support from government, our partners and stakeholders collectively, this will turn around for the good of the nation."

Fagbemi commended the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) for its role in sustaining businesses since the outbreak of Covid-19, emphasising the importance of regulatory compliance.

The company is now planning to spend around \$167,000 – part of the \$60 million allocated by the Nigerian Government as a palliative to the aviation industry – on upgrading its facilities.

"Basically, our focus now is to grow our business," she explained. "By and large, the aviation industry in Nigeria has stabilised. There are expectations that we will get to pre-Covid levels by 2022-2023 for passenger handling."

A lot of the immediate growth is coming from cargo rather than passenger. In the last quarter of 2020, NAHCO's monthly cargo export from Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos had grown from 500 metric tonnes to one million metric tonnes.

Now, in addition to her plan for growth, the CEO is also calling for a more structured approach to the way ground-handling is priced. For years, NAHCO and SAHCO have been in stiff competition, which sometimes involved fluctuations in pricing. Fagbemi believes this must change.

"If we are able to charge appropriately for our ground-handling services, we can do better," she concluded. ■

Gradually, we see ourselves coming out of darkness into light. We see a consistent sure path to recovery.

OLATOKUNBO FAGBEMI

Jonathan Lewis, managing director at NAC2000, Zambia's largest independent ground-handler, tells Keith Mwanalushi about how the pandemic not only created unique challenges, but also pockets of opportunity.

Improving, from the ground up

The Covid-19 pandemic created significant challenges for small but growing aviation markets like Zambia, putting crisis management to the ultimate test. For ground-handlers, it has been an exceptionally tough year.

"The pandemic really had an impact on our business. We went from an average of 80 flights a week across our four stations to one flight a week in Lusaka at the start of March 2020," explained NAC2000 managing director, Jonathan Lewis.

NAC2000 is a Zambian private company incorporated in the year 2000. It was born out of the liquidated Zambia Airways cargo subsidiary, National Air Charters (NAC).

The company provides ground services at the country's four main international airports – Lusaka, the capital, Ndola in the Copperbelt, Livingstone (Victoria Falls), and Mfuwe.

NAC2000 handles a broad spectrum of special flights, from VVIP, presidential, and royal travel, all the way through to tourist and cargo charters of all sizes.

Lewis feels his company's reputation has cemented its position as the ad hoc handler of choice within the Zambian handling, import and export community.

"We deal with all the ad hoc charters and scheduled airline services, and also offer cargo warehousing supporting key economic activities for both imports and exports," he said.

Prior to the pandemic, NAC2000 was handling most of the charter business and around 70% of the country's private traffic. However, with travel restrictions and the closure of Mfuwe, Ndola and Livingstone airports, this meant operations had to be suspended. "Initially things seemed bleak, as



Jonathan Lewis: "We went from an average of 80 flights a week across our four stations to one flight a week in Lusaka."

PICTURE: NAC2000

we had demand for export perishable products but very little available capacity," he said.

"Thankfully, due to the influx of import freight and medical PPE cargo, we were able to facilitate both import and export demand."

Lewis indicated that cargo volumes overall year-on-year have dropped. However, while scheduled flights plummeted, there was some glimmer of hope with private charters from business travellers and the transportation of essential people and goods including, for instance, the movement of Zambian troops into

Taking a hit: Cargo volumes overall year on year have dropped.

PICTURE: NAC2000



peacekeeping countries by the UN, and equipment coming into the copper mines – "those are the kind of handlings we do."

According to International Air Transport Association (IATA) guidelines, there are no specific measures recommended for the handling of baggage and cargo during the pandemic. However, general biosafety measures should be practised as appropriate against the potential risk of infection.

Consequently, apart from all the standard Covid-19 preventative measures, like using PPE and social distancing, NAC2000 also had to adapt to other operational changes. Cargo in the cabin, for example, presented new challenges, with standard operating procedures having to be adjusted promptly.

"This included the need for more trained ramp agents for manual off-loading, and moving a considerable number of cargoes by hand rather than relying on ground support equipment that could have done the work in a quarter of the time," explained Lewis.

The MD attributes this ability to adjust quickly to both close client communication and cooperation, and the positive mindset of his management and staff.

NAC2000 now takes extra precautions to ensure its personnel have access to full PPE kits when handling sensitive cargoes, like human remains and, or, medevac flights.

"We do what we can to ensure our most valuable resource – our employees – are adequately protected," said Lewis. "Planning has also improved as we reduce the need for different shifts to mix with one another and, where possible, some staff have been able to work from



home to reduce any possible transmission of the coronavirus.”

He said the company has used some of the available ‘downtime’ to review procedures and documentation, as well as online training. “We carry out frequent fumigation of our cargo and premises and have, so far from a sickness perspective, been relatively fortunate with no serious infections,” he reported.

Several years ago, the Zambian Government embarked on a programme to improve the infrastructure at all of its international airports. This is being done in collaboration with private sector participation.

The Zambia Development Agency (ZDA) has reported that infrastructure remains a major challenge to growth, economic diversification and human development in Zambia. As such, its development is one of the current government’s priority areas.

The new airport development at Kenneth Kaunda International Airport (KKIA) in Lusaka is due for completion this year, as is the Copperbelt International Airport in Ndola.

NAC2000 has recently opened a new multipurpose cargo facility at Lusaka and plans to roll out new facilities at other locations as soon as market research demonstrates the demand. The Lusaka facility complements the new terminal and other airport infrastructure due to be commissioned later this year.

“We are confident that, as we get past the recovery from the pandemic, the new terminal will certainly boost the profile and capacity of Lusaka as a whole and facilitate a world-class travel experience for both normal and transiting

passengers,” said Lewis.

The new terminal at Livingstone Airport has also ensured that tourist visitors arrive and leave with great impressions of the country, encouraging further visits.

Lewis believes the new Ndola Airport will offer an experience not previously available to the region and will allow for wide-body and airline freighter operations. “All of these infrastructure developments are welcome for the advancement of the aviation sector, not only in Zambia, but also the region, and we hope to play an integral part in their development and success,” he said.



As Zambia’s economy and population grows and, as the country implements its commitment to the Yamoussoukro Decision (YD) and launches its own national airline, Lewis reckons the market will inevitably see growth. When this happens, he feels NAC2000 is well prepared.

Certainly, increased connectivity within the region will play a pivotal role in rebuilding and generating growth in the movement of cargo and goods.

In March this year, the ZDA said the country’s recent ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was a step in the right direction and would help boost Zambia’s economy by harmonising trade liberalisation at a continental level.

Greater intra-African trade could foster a more competitive manufacturing sector to create opportunities for industries, including air freight and the associated handling.

The potential is there, but clearly underdeveloped. For example, the ZDA recently disclosed that exports to neighbouring Angola over the past five years had averaged around \$5 million.

Given the combined gross domestic product (GDP) of \$100 billion and a 50 million consumer base for both countries, this is extremely low – especially considering several investment opportunities had been identified since a bilateral trade agreement was signed between the two countries in 2016.

It is expected that carriers like Ethiopian Airlines will continue to add cargo capacity into markets like Zambia, as the airline’s CEO, Tewolde GebreMariam, suggested in March.

Speaking at the delivery of a passenger-to-freighter converted 737-800, he said the aircraft was a significant addition to the airline’s freighter capacity and that the frequency would enhance Ethiopian’s capability to serve short-haul destinations in Africa more economically, including the transportation of the much-needed medical supplies and vaccines.

In the meantime, NAC2000 seems geared up for a recovery armed with the only IATA safety audit for ground operations (ISAGO) certification in the country.

The bible for all cargo ground-handling operations, the ISAGO manual is a hefty tome that is updated annually to reflect best practice in the industry. With that in hand, it should add up to a business advantage.

Lewis is certain he is steering the corporation to proactively ensure it has a solid network of clients to handle flights in Zambia. ■



Top backing: President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, and Qatar Airways group CEO, Akbar Al Baker, at the opening of the 2019 event, demonstrating the level of interest and commitment the summit generates.

PICTURE: BILLYPIX.

Main picture: The Kigali Convention Centre, which will host the summit.

PICTURE: AKGERA AVIATION



CAVERTON CHALKS UP AFRICAN TRAINING 'FIRST'

Caverton Helicopters has chosen the Thales Reality H full-flight simulator (FFS) for AW139 pilot training at its facility in Lagos.

The simulator will be an essential tool in improving the overall safety of helicopter flights in the Nigerian and regional aviation sector and will help to answer the increasing demand for helicopter initial and recurrent pilot training.

It will be installed within Caverton's new Flight Training Academy (soon to be certified by the Nigerian and European civil aviation authorities), at Murtala Muhammed International Airport, next to the MRO facility, currently under construction.

This ambitious project is part of Caverton's strategy regarding flight simulation training services as a key aviation and marine logistics player for the Nigerian oil and gas industry sector, and the first fully integrated offshore support company in sub-Saharan Africa.

"Safety is our priority at Caverton and we are



Done deal: The agreement is signed.

PICTURE: CAVERTON

committed to improving flight safety across our industry and the region through simulator-based training," said Aderemi Makanjuola, chairman of the Caverton offshore support group.

The Thales Reality H full-flight simulator will provide realistic

scenario-based flight and mission training, including initial type rating, continuous training and proficiency checks (VFR & IFR), for offshore and onshore missions, as well as VIP transport operations.

According to Benoit Plantier, VP Thales, training & simulation, this contract is a "key milestone for Thales as it will be the first helicopter level D full-flight simulator to be installed in Africa".

He added that it would strengthen Caverton's position as a leading provider of aviation logistics and training services in the region, enabling the company to expand its service offer, while improving security of helicopter flights. ■

ANURADHA DEENAPANRAY

DES OPPORTUNITÉS POUR LE MAROC

La formation tient une place prépondérante dans l'industrie aéronautique marocaine en développement.

L'industrie aéronautique marocaine a été très résiliente dans le contexte actuel. Elle entrevoit aujourd'hui une éclaircie, l'objectif étant de rebondir rapidement et garder son potentiel compétitif. Pour cela, elle a mis en place dès le début de la crise, un plan de relance sous l'égide du GIMAS.

Le secteur de la formation aéronautique est capital pour préparer la reprise. Celle-ci est également en mutation avec le lancement en mars dernier, des travaux d'extension de l'institut spécialisé dans les métiers de l'aéronautique et de la logistique aéroportuaire (ISMALA). Ils offriront une capacité d'accueil annuelle additionnelle de 1200 places pédagogiques dans 9 filières : la logistique aéroportuaire, le traitement de surface, le traitement thermique, le soudage, l'usinage sur machines à commande numérique, la mécanique avions et les « aérostructures ».

Le Maroc souhaite donc créer de nouvelles opportunités de business. Le GIMAS travaille notamment à attirer des capacités en Asie pour les relocaliser au Maroc.

L'ONDA prévoit de se lancer dans la construction et l'exploitation d'un centre de stockage, de démantèlement et de recyclage des avions. Un appel d'offres serait lancé pour un site à proximité de l'aéroport d'Oujda-Angads. ■

VINCENT CHAPPARD

SUMMIT TO HERALD A NEW DAWN FOR AFRICA

Aviation is going to be the key enabler for Africa to achieve its ambitions, whether it be for growth in trade, tourism or economies, writes **Alan Peaford**.

The year's premier in-person event, Aviation Africa Summit 2021, will be the start of the new dawn for aviation as it looks beyond the recovery of the industry from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The event takes place in Kigali, in partnership between Times Aerospace Events and the Rwanda Civil Aviation Authority, on October 14-15.

C-level leaders from some of the continent's top airlines will be sharing their experiences of the past 18-months and talking strategy for taking their brands to the next stage.

But a key focus of the summit will be around the competition they will face.

While many airlines have suffered, the door has opened for new opportunities. Around Africa, start-up airlines are sharpening business plans, looking for funding or deals with OEMs, and navigating their way through the legal and financial challenges.

The entrepreneurs will join experts from the legal and finance firms to talk about the challenges to entry and why they believe they will succeed.

Looking even further ahead, opportunities to develop unmanned cargo, electric hybrid regional aircraft, and

urban air mobility could change the aviation landscape.

The summit will hear how airships could be the overland alternative to cruises as they glide over key tourism attractions such as safaris; how drones will move from delivering essential medical supplies to rural communities to delivering greater cargo packages and opening new markets. Pioneers in regional advanced air travel will show how journeys of 1,000 miles can open new routes that are both affordable and sustainable.

□ □ □ □ □

In order to live the dream, air traffic management will need to develop through collaboration. The summit will bring together directors general from the civil aviation authorities, as well as air navigation service providers (ANSPs) and consultants to shape the pathway.

Maintenance is another essential and the summit will hear from leading MRO providers and airline engineering departments to address how to close the gap on other regions.

The final key is people. If the continent is to deliver its dream, then who will make it happen? We will hear from key organisations and influencers, who will share strong views on how attitudes must change to bring it all together. ■

● Event details can be found on www.aviationafrica.aero

SUMMARY

NIGER DRONES AIMS HIGH

Lifetime aerospace enthusiast, **Abdoulaziz Kountché**, runs **Drone Africa Service**, providing vital missions for NGOs and also for Niger's companies and authorities.

He founded his company in 2016 and he now works with a variety of partners, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Red Cross, and the Niger authorities.

Drone Africa Service develops and produces its own range of airborne vehicles that can operate in harsh environments, such as the Sahel region that comprises portions of 10 African countries.

Kountché also intends to operate in the small freight sector, particularly in medicine, where speed is vital. "We are gearing-up to fly very long distances with vital loads so countries in the region must adapt their regulations to this type of activity," he said. ■

UNE VÉRITABLE DRONE STORY AU NIGER

Des missions auprès d'ONG et pour les autorités nigériennes, des drones Made in Niger, c'est le quotidien d'Abdoulaziz Kountché, fondateur de Drone Africa Service, depuis plus d'une décennie. Son portrait avec Vincent Chappard.

Abdoulaziz Kountché est avant tout un passionné d'aéronautique. Cette passion lui a été transmise par son père, qui l'emmenait voler à l'aéroclub, dès l'âge de quatre ans. Il a grandi et imbibé par l'ambiance de l'écosystème des avions, du pilotage à l'aéromodélisme.

De fil en aiguille, il est devenu consultant et a assuré ses premières missions sur la cartographie de plusieurs villages sensibles aux inondations dans la ville de Gaya.

Avec 10 ans d'expérience et de savoir-faire dans la récolte de données son activité s'étend vers le Bénin, le Burkina-Faso et le Mali. C'est en 2016, qu'il fonda sa start-up Drone Africa Service.

Elle travaille aujourd'hui avec de nombreux partenaires : les ONGs comme le HCR, la Croix Rouge, l'ONU et les autorités nigériennes.

« Nous collaborons avec des partenaires étatiques et les ONGs, c'est ce qui fait notre force », rappelle-t-il. « Le drone est un secteur sensible qui nécessite plusieurs autorisation et



Abdoulaziz Kountché: « Nous nous préparons à pouvoir voler sur de très longue distance. »

PICTURE: DAS

habilitation pour opérer. »

Drone Africa Service développe et produit sa propre gamme de drones qui peuvent intervenir dans les milieux rudes tels que le Sahel.

Abdoulaziz Kountché souhaite se positionner sur le secteur du fret particulièrement dans le domaine médical.

« Nous nous préparons à pouvoir voler sur de très longue distance avec des charges qui doivent être de plus en plus importante qu'aujourd'hui. Il sera également nécessaire que les pays du continent adaptent leur réglementation à ce type d'activités. »

Une Drone Academy pour l'Afrique

« L'Afrique a beaucoup de compétences. Mon rêve est que le Niger devienne un pôle d'excellence en matière de technologies relatives aux drones. Nous avons aujourd'hui le savoir-faire, la capacité et l'autorisation de former à l'échelle nationale », avoue **Abdoulaziz Kountché**. ■

AERONAUTICS INVESTMENT

Despite the ravages of Covid-19, Morocco continues to invest in the development of a key aeronautics sector.

The Moroccan aviation industry has been relatively resilient during the pandemic, so the aim is to bounce back fast by initiating a recovery plan devised by the Group of Moroccan Aeronautics and Space Industries (GIMAS).

GIMAS understands that training is vital as the industry continues to prepare for full recovery. And, to this end, March saw the launch of a project to expand the institute specialising in aeronautics and airport logistics (ISMALA).

It plans to increase its annual capacity of 1,200 educational places in sectors including airport logistics, surface treatment, heat treatment, welding, digital machining, aircraft mechanics and aerostructures. ■



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West Africa does not have many companies dedicated to providing aeromedical emergency services and those that do have had to contend with new challenges since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Chukwu Emeke reports.

PROGNOSIS THAT CAN CUT RED TAPE AND SAVE LIVES

Lifesaving: The Isopod is the first and, currently, the only such biological isolation chamber in Nigeria.

PICTURES: FDN.



Since the outbreak of Covid-19, there has been unprecedented demand for patient transfers throughout west Africa. However, this sheer volume is causing problems.

According to Oluwatosin Aremu, general manager of Flying Doctors Nigeria (FDN): “The major challenge is timely issuance of permits and approvals, considering that every second counts in medical evacuation.”

This is not surprising, considering the age-old problems associated with securing flight permits by scheduled operators from anglophone west African countries intending to connect with their francophone-controlled neighbours.

FDN, which is currently managed by a board of directors, was established in 2007 by Ola Brown, a British-Nigerian medical doctor and healthcare entrepreneur, who was motivated to start the company after experiencing the loss of her sister when no services were available to save her life in time.

A solution to the delays in issuing permits and approvals needs effective and timely coordination among the regulatory and issuing bodies, said Aremu.

To improve service in the sub-sector, FDN has called on all stakeholders to meet and create a standard operating policy for aeromedical transfers.

One of the numerous challenges of evacuation procedures has been the high risk involved in the transfer of patients – including the increased possibilities of flightcrew exposure due to prolonged close contact with contagious patients.

Aeromedical organisations across the world have had to develop new, specific, procedures to limit cross-contamination. FDN has also sought solutions to some of these challenges,



Dr Ola Brown: Established the company in 2007.

one of which is intensified personnel training. “We felt the impact on our business process and operations but we were able to quickly adjust so as to mitigate the negative impact,” said Aremu. “Experts have said that one of the effective ways of fighting the spread of the virus is through testing. We concur, so jointly with the investment arm of our business, which is flying doctors healthcare investment company (FDHIC), we created interventions that are helping to make testing faster, cheaper and safer.

“One such intervention is our mobile testing booth, which has significantly reduced the reported cases of healthcare workers’ infection.

“We have also managed a lot of asymptomatic/mild cases of Covid-19 through our telemedicine platform, which reduces the risk of cross-infection but still gives personalised healthcare for the patients.

“We have built a strategic partnership and relationship with all the stakeholders who are typically involved in the transfer of patient from bed-to-bed. Some of these include hospitals, regulatory bodies, airlines and so on.”



FDN has also introduced the first and, currently, only Isopod biological isolation chamber in Nigeria.

Unveiling the Isopod, medical director, Dr Jibayo Oyedele, said: “Our focus has always been to ensure that exceptional healthcare services are available to people in their locations of choice. With this isolation pod, we are now able to evacuate and transport Covid-19 patients to their preferred destination to access medical care without the risk of cross-infection to the medical and aviation crew.”

Millions of direct and indirect jobs have been lost due to the pandemic and the number of low-income earners and unemployed people has increased, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. So, as west Africa awaits vaccines from the western world in the middle of economic downturns, how is FDN responding?

“We continue to improve on our innovations in terms of our medical evacuation to suit all categories of earners,” said Aremu. “Our emergency transport unit (ETU) and commercial medical escort (CME) are a more cost-effective means of aeromedical transfer. We are not only putting more structures in place to ensure successful aeromedical transfers in terms of cost, time and safety, but also funding and operating healthcare infrastructure projects across Africa.”

Flying Doctors has been on the frontline against coronavirus, setting up mobile testing centres in response to both government and private requests. It has also set up a \$1 billion fund to invest in healthcare across Africa.

“We have been investing in Nigeria, we wanted to start investing across Africa and that’s the purpose of opening up to external investors and to now invest in more companies,” said Dr Brown. ■

Krista Vandermeulen *Marcelle Nethersole speaks to the CEO of WeCair.*

PICTURE: WECAIR

1

■ Can you tell me about WeCair's background?

WeCair is an international pilot training school based in Bordeaux, France, and founded in 2017 by myself, a business developer, and Philippe Borghini, a fighter pilot.

The combination of the experience of the two founders has given birth to a professional training programme that is characterised by its pragmatism, as well as its audacity.

Our sole goal is to train pilots in accordance with airline company needs. During their training, our students evolve in different environments (Florida, Bordeaux, and Brussels), thus making them immediately operational for the airline.

Our only aim is excellence, so our students pass selection tests before entering the academy. We believe in intellectual honesty towards the students and only those who pass the tests successfully can enrol in our programme.

2

■ I understand the school is now working with Cote d'Ivoire. Can you tell me more?

At the moment, we are training cadets for Air Cote d'Ivoire together with our Belgian partner. We currently have 17 students in training, who were selected out of 2,000 candidates.

Our instructors spent nine months on site in Yamoussoukro to teach all the theoretical modules as specified by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

The experience and expertise of our instructors, gained over many years working in airline companies, is crucial in order to transfer this knowledge to the students. This methodology ensures a 100% success rate at the air transport pilot licence (ATPL) exam and, what's even more impressive, is the students' overall average score of 92.7%.

I am proud to announce that we will be launching admission tests in Cote d'Ivoire this year, open to all students from the African continent.

3

■ Do the younger generation in Africa show an interest in becoming a pilot?

Yes! Having an office in the sky is the dream of many young people.

Aviation in Africa will become a very important industry and will play a key role in the economic development of each country.

Unfortunately, around the world, only 8% of pilots are women. This figure is far too low. I can only encourage girls to follow their dreams and improve those statistics.

At WeCair we have, on average, 15% of woman in each class, which is encouraging but still only represents three in every 20 students.

I would really like to open an all-girl class for an airline in order to blow away all limiting beliefs and open up new opportunities.

4

■ Are other African countries interesting to WeCair?

Yes, we receive several requests every day, mainly from west and east African countries. With our 'flying instructors team', our model is very flexible and we can go wherever training is needed. We work closely with the training manager of the airline as, again, it is all about understanding their needs.

Our experience with Air Cote d'Ivoire has shown us that it is important for airlines to train their local people. It is crucial for airlines to have a certain loyalty when they hire people.

A lot of African companies work with expats and this is often a problem after a few years when they want to go back to their home country. The airlines aim for long-term commitment and, therefore, training natives locally to EASA standards just makes sense.

5

■ Where do you see the company in five years' time?

I prefer living in the present and making every day a little step towards our goal, which is to become a key player in pilot training in Africa.

Over the next five years, I see our company working closely together with airlines and contributing, at my humble level, to the education of young people and, as a result, the economic and social growth of Africa.

6

■ What does a typical day involve for you?

A lot of listening, identifying the needs of our customers (airlines), our students and our team, and being creative so as to make them happy, to keep them satisfied.

Starting the day with a smile and finishing it with a smile is the definition of a successful day for me.



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