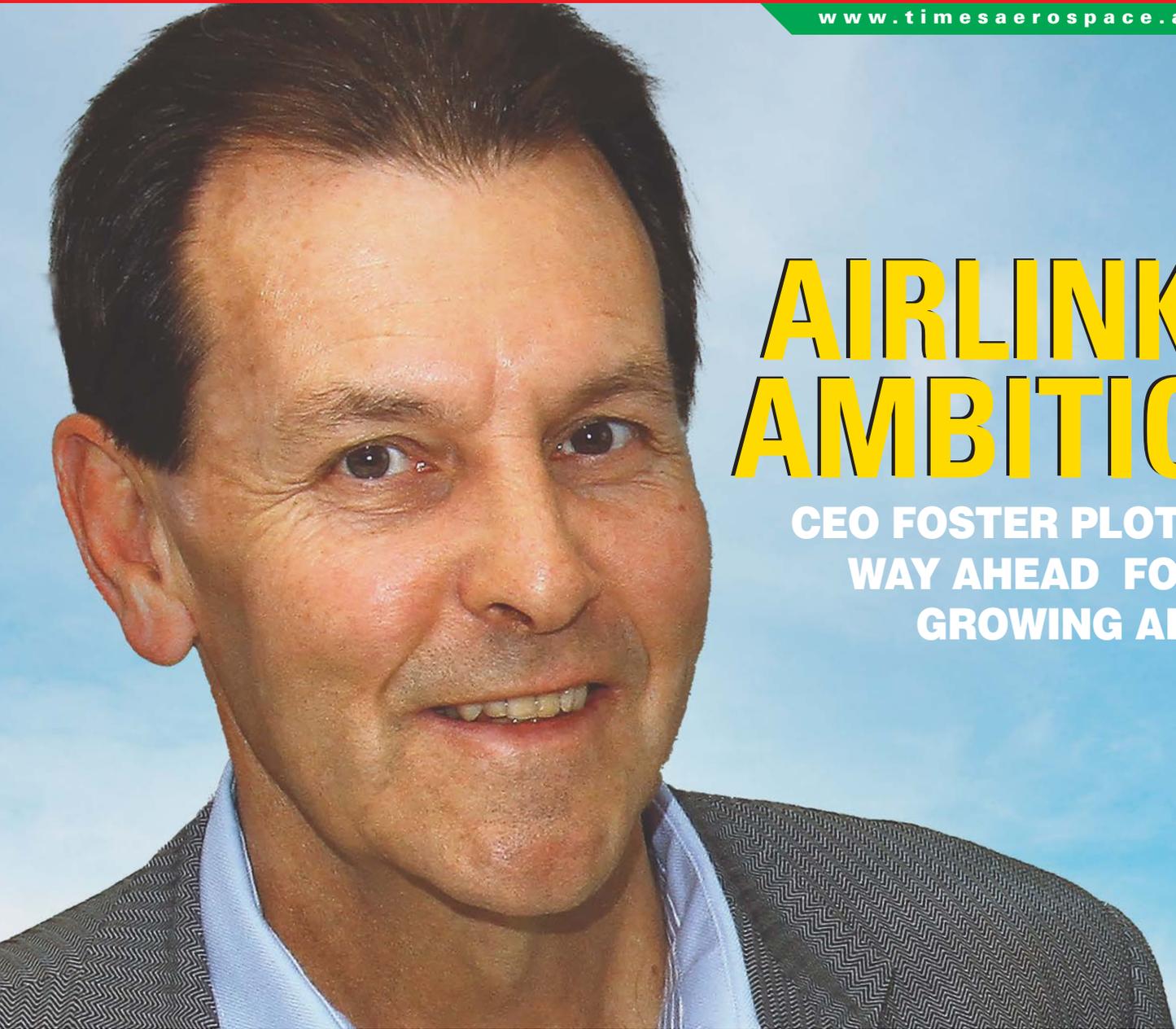




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# Africa at the forefront of diversity

**T**he IATA Annual General Meeting in early June, hosted by Emirates Airline in Dubai, was a rich illustration of how Africa is playing a leading role in increasing the number of women in top roles in the airline and aviation industry.

This is not a new phenomenon for Africa, as the continent has long been a strong advocate of promoting diversity and inclusion across the air transport value chain. Carriers such as Ethiopian Airlines and Kenya Airways, among many others, have good track records on employing and promoting more women.

However, it was gratifying to see examples of this diversity drive in action in Dubai. One of the most prominent is Yvonne Manzi Makolo, CEO of RwandAir, who has been the first ever female chair of the IATA board of governors (BoG). She was the first woman to assume the chair after 80 men had preceded her in this role.

As the chair position was handed over to Pieter Elbers, the head of IndiGo, IATA director general Willie Walsh praised Makolo for her support and leadership. “As our first female BoG chair, Yvonne has been an inspiration for the 25by2025 initiative to improve aviation’s gender balance,” he said.

However, speaking in Dubai, Makolo said this is no reason to think the job is done. “As the first female chair of IATA’s board of governors, I was aware of the example it gives to all women in aviation and of my responsibility as an agent of much-needed change,” she told reporters.

Her desire is that IATA’s 25by2025 initiative, which had the aim of increasing the number of women in senior positions at airlines by 2025, has helped create a mindset “where there is nothing special in IATA having a female chair of the board or an airline having a gender-balanced management team or pilot population.”

The event also celebrated IATA’s 2024 diversity and inclusion awards and an African woman was recognised. The ‘High Flyer’ award went to Mafunase Ngosa Malenga, the founder and managing director of the Southern Africa Institute of Aviation Science and Technology. Her institute now has more than 800 graduates, 80 per cent of whom are women.

“The winners are true beacons of the change that is happening as diversity and inclusion entrenches itself as a strategic priority for the aviation industry. Their contributions to righting the gender balance in aviation are truly inspirational and deserving of today’s recognition,” said Makolo.

In Dubai, *African Aerospace* spoke to another new female African airline CEO, Lulu Rasebotsa of Air Botswana as she seeks to put this struggling carrier on a sustainably footing (see story on page 29).

One day, the hope is we will not record the fact that Rasebotsa is a woman as the gender balance in our industry normalizes.

**Mark Pilling, Consultant Editor**



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President & CEO, CFM International*



**On the attack: The AH-1Z Viper advanced attack helicopter.**

IMAGE: WIKIPEDIA COMMONS, U.S. MARINE CORPS CPL. JONATHAN L. GONZALEZ

## Bell Vipers boost Nigeria's firepower

The United States Naval Air Systems Command has contracted Bell Textron a \$455 million contract to supply the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) with 12 AH-1Z Viper advanced attack helicopters. This will boost its firepower and operational capabilities for counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations.

Bell Textron will produce and deliver the

helicopters, together with associated post-delivery engineering, logistics, programme management as well as life extension support services for the aircraft.

Some of the new aircraft expected to boost the NAF firepower include eight Hungarian-made Magnus light-attack helicopters, 12 US-made MD-530 Cayuse Warrior attack

helicopters, 10 Bayraktar attack drones from Turkey and 24 M-346 fighter jets from Italian military aerospace equipment giant Leonardo.

Internally, the NAF is advancing efforts to operationalise a modern force with the construction of a US\$3.2 million aircraft hangar at the Bola Ahmed Tinubu International Airport in Niger State.

## Flydocs data

Flydocs has signed a five-year deal with Air Austral to digitise the records management process across its fleet of eight aircraft.

The agreement brings together solutions from flydocs to create value out of aircraft maintenance data for Air Austral in the form of digital records management ensuring smooth integration with their maintenance and engineering systems.

annually, the airport is poised to meet the increasing demand for air travel.

## Libyan order

Libya's Berniq Airways has signed an agreement with Airbus to purchase six new A320neo and A321neo aircraft. The agreement will be followed by several others in various sectors, the most important of which are training, maintenance and safety.

## Training Nigeria

AAAU Abuja and Caliphate Aviation Centre have signed an MoU for academic advancement.

Caliphate Aviation Training Centre, located in Kano, Nigeria, is a certified air transport training institution offering an array of aviation and management-related courses, as well as aviation support services.

The primary aim of the

MoU is to enhance training programmes, particularly short courses, through collaborative efforts between the two institutions.

## Lisbon bound

TAAG Angola Airlines has resumed operations of its Luanda-Lisbon route with its international fleet.

The route will be operated by two Boeing 777-300ER. This service was previously carried out using an aircraft from the HiFly airline, on a wet lease basis, due to the maintenance of TAAG's international fleet.

"The Luanda-Lisbon service plays an important role at various levels, from economic dynamisation to social cohesion, and this solution represented a commitment, together with HiFly, to guarantee a reliable and efficient service for our passengers," said Nelson de Oliveira, TAAG CEO.



Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO, Mesfin Tasew helped unveil the new domestic terminal. IMAGE: ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES

## Ethiopian opens transformed Addis Ababa domestic terminal

Ethiopian Airlines inaugurated its transformed Addis Ababa Bole International Airport's Domestic Terminal in May.

The \$50 million USD expansion and renovation project has significantly upgraded the terminal, expanding its total built-up area by more than two-fold to 25,750 m2 and doubling its handling capacity.

Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO, Mesfin Tasew said: "This is a significant addition to our initiative of modernising and renovating airports and aviation facilities in the country. As the demand in domestic travel is growing, the completion of this project will allow us to offer a smooth travel experience to our esteemed passengers."

The expanded terminal features modern airport systems and facilities including four contact gates, 10 remote departure gates, 22 check-in counters with an automated hold baggage screening system, self check-in kiosks, modern security and screening system.

## Kumasi opens

After six years of renovation, Ghana's Kumasi International Airport has reopened. The country's president, Nana Addo Dankwa Afuo-Addo, officially opened the airport on May 10 and renamed it Nana Agyemang Prempeh I International Airport.

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## Malawi mourns

Malawi's vice president, Saulos Chilima, was killed in a plane crash in the country's Chikangawa mountain range, along with nine other passengers, in June.

The aircraft, a Dornier 228-type twin propeller plane belonging to Malawi's military, was unable to land due to bad weather and poor visibility and was told to return to the capital, Lilongwe, but went off the radar. The wreckage of the plane was found 24 hours later.

## Double contract

CPaT is expanding its presence in the North African region with Libyan airline, Ghadames Air. CPaT will be providing Ghadames Air with their aircraft systems courses and library of general subjects for the Boeing 737 Classic and Boeing 777 fleets, along with their cabin crew training suite which includes Boeing 777 aircraft systems for cabin crew and cabin crew safety.

CPaT has also been awarded a new contract with Arik Air to provide its pilots with its 737-800 and Bombardier DHC-8/Q400 aircraft systems and general subjects.

## Ethiopian celebrates

Ethiopian Airlines Group marked its 78th anniversary in April.

Chief commercial officer

## Kenya project targets aviation professionals of the future

Boeing and Digital Divide Data (DDD) launched an aviation-focused employability programme for Kenyan youth in April.

The initiative serves as a stepping-stone for their future careers in aviation.

Kuljit Ghata-Aura, president of Boeing Middle East, Türkiye, Africa, and Central Asia, said: "The African aviation industry is booming. We forecast that Africa will need more than 1,000 new aircraft and 69,000 aviation professionals to support that growth over the next 20 years.

"It is imperative we act now to prepare and inspire the future generation of aviation professionals in Africa.

"We are very proud to launch this impactful programme with our partners, DDD, to empower African youth to kickstart fulfilling careers in our industry."

Boeing's collaboration with DDD spans 16 years, during which they have provided job skills training to 1,000 young people in Kenya.

Youngsters attended the aviation-focused employability programme.

IMAGE: BOEING



Lemma Yadecha, said: "We strive to foster a sense of unity and belongingness among our passengers, regardless of their background or belief. This anniversary is a celebration of unity and diversity. By stepping into the roles of our dedicated ground and flight crew, we honour every individual who has been part of our story. Our service today is a promise of continued service excellence for all our passengers."

## New cargo stops

RwandAir Cargo is launching new services to Dubai and Djibouti, both operated by its dedicated freighter Boeing 738SF. The expansion is part of the airline's mission to connect Africa and the world.

Yvonne Makolo, CEO of RwandAir, said: "The added destinations will support efficient and reliable connections for business and provide significant opportunities for enhanced trade between Rwanda, the UAE, Djibouti, and the rest of the continent.

"As a landlocked nation, we recognise the importance of air freight in Rwanda's economic growth across Africa and beyond."

## Technical training

Aviation Group has been developing a pilot aeronautical mechanics training programme in Cameroon for AOD Aviation Academy based at Yaounde-Nsimalen.

Francisco Castano, manager of Aviation Group

said: "It is very exciting what we are doing to raise the level of aeronautical technical training in Cameroon. The objective of this programme is for students to obtain, in the shortest possible time, the aeronautical maintenance licence from EASA."

## Non-stop re-starts

Royal Air Maroc will resume direct flights from Casablanca to São Paulo. This is the airline's longest-planned non-stop route. RAM will begin serving São Paulo Guarulhos International Airport from its hub at Casablanca Mohammed V International on December 7, 2024. The service will be operated three times a week with the Boeing 787 Dreamliner.

## Rwanda's Gain

GainJet Aviation Group has established a new Line Station Facility at Kigali International Airport, Rwanda.

GainJet accountable manager, Simon Roussos said: "GainJet has been a strong advocate of the African aviation market, having been present in Africa for over 15 years. Establishing an EASA approved line maintenance station in the region is the most symbolic step that we've taken yet, as we further grow our presence in Africa. Keep watching, there is more to come." The Kigali Line Station will operate in direct cooperation with GainJet's line maintenance HQ in Athens, and it will be staffed around the clock.

## Air Senegal strengthens domestic network

Air Senegal has taken delivery of two Aircraft Industries L410 NGs which will serve its domestic routes.

The two L410 NGs, delivered by the Czech company Ommypole, are part of an order for five aircraft. They are meant to consolidate Air Senegal's fleet, improve connectivity between cities and boost domestic air traffic.

The L410 NG aircraft is the latest L410 aircraft model designed and manufactured by the Czech company LET Aircraft Industries. Serial production started in 2018.

Compared with previous models, the L410 NG offers an improved flight envelope, modernised avionics, and a bigger luggage compartment as well as low operating and maintenance costs.

It can carry 500kg in increased payload and can be configured as a cargo plane. The L410 NG is also designed for short take-offs and landings.



Delivery of the Air Senegal L410 NGs to Senegal.

PICTURE: MITTA SENEGAL



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## Nigeria Air project suspended indefinitely

Nigeria's former minister of aviation and aerospace development, Hadi Sirika on his appointment in 2015, put forward an aviation roadmap with a national carrier as the queen project, which he promised must be delivered to the Nigerian people before the end of Muhammadu Buhari-led administration.

In 2018, he unveiled the Nigeria Air logo at the Farnborough Air Show in the United Kingdom.

Many wondered why the unveiling of Nigeria's own airline was done in another country. The prospective airline continued to gulp huge sums of money, despite the fact that no aircraft were acquired.

In 2022, the minister approached Ethiopian Airlines for partnership discussions and arrived at an



IMAGE: FEDERAL MINISTRY OF AVIATION AND AEROSPACE DEVELOPMENT.

ownership arrangement that gave Ethiopian Airlines a 49 per cent equity stake.

The federal government had a five per cent equity, while a consortium of three Nigerian investors held 46 per cent.

In November 2022, the Airline Operators of Nigeria (AON) approached a federal high court in Lagos to obtain an interim injunction to

prevent the ministry from progressing with the launch of the new national carrier. Minister Sirika insisted that the airline would commence operations before May 29, 2023 and that "nothing would stop it".

Eventually, a Boeing 737 aircraft painted in Nigeria Air colours landed at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, in Abuja, with much pomp

and ceremony, only to be flown back to its owners in Addis Ababa.

In June 2023, stakeholders, including the house of representatives of the federal government to suspend the Nigerian Air project, describing it as a fraud.

The then group CEO of Ethiopian Airlines, Mesfin Tasew, said it was the leadership of Nigeria Air that

"asked us to bring an aircraft painted with the Nigerian logo to facilitate the progress of the air operators' certificate. So, we agreed with that."

Sirika's successor, Festus Keyamo, who declared the national carrier project suspended in August, 2023 said: "It was not a deal that was good for Nigeria in the long run."

"The whole composition and the totality of that deal was merely Ethiopian Airlines flying Nigeria Air. It was a foreign airline trying to fly a Nigerian flag."

On May 28, 2024, Keyamo reaffirmed during a ministerial press briefing in Abuja, marking president Bola Tinubu's first year in office, that the Nigeria Air project remains 'suspended indefinitely'.



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*Navigating South Africa's airline scene has never been more complex. The market has changed massively in the past four years, with many of the old-established carriers no longer in existence and newcomers keen to take their places. Alan Dron investigates.*

# Rodger fosters Airlink's flightpath

“If you look at the composition of the market before Covid, it was very different from where it is now. Airlink has stepped into the gap left by SAA, Comair and Air Namibia.”

RODGER FOSTER

**S**outh Africa has also become a hunting ground for foreign airlines, thanks to South Africa's generosity in liberalising its aviation market, says one of the country's veteran airline bosses.

Rodger Foster, CEO and MD of regional carrier Airlink, says the country's domestic landscape has changed out of all recognition since the pandemic. Flag-carrier South African Airways (SAA), once the nation's dominant airline, is a shadow of its former self after having emerged from a lengthy restructuring under South Africa's "business rescue" procedure.

SAA's low-cost carrier (LCC) subsidiary, Mango, has collapsed, as have SAA's regional operator South African Express (SAX) and British Airways franchise operation Comair.

In their place, LCC FlySafair has sprung to prominence, and newcomer Lift is also making inroads into the market.

FlySafair holds the dominant position on the country's trunk routes and has around 60 per cent of the domestic market, while Airlink has around 20 per cent, with the remainder split between Lift, SAA and CemAir.

"It's quite different within the region. If you look at the composition of the market before Covid, it was very different from where it is now. Airlink has stepped into the gap left by SAA, Comair and Air Namibia. All of that presented opportunities, during and subsequent to Covid."

Seizing those opportunities has resulted in Airlink now having the most comprehensive route map and greatest flight frequencies within southern Africa, Foster said, although he reckons that the market has still only recovered to around 80 per cent of pre-pandemic levels.

To service this market, Airlink's aircraft have changed in recent years. Gone are the 29-seater BAe Jetstream 41 turboprops

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on Page 14 ▲

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that served as the company's smallest aircraft, which has evolved into an all-jet Embraer fleet.

This consists of 27 Embraer Regional Jets – 16 37-seat ERJ135s plus 11 44-seat ERJ140s – for thinner routes, with the trunk sectors being served by three newer-generation E170s (74 seats), E190 (98 seats) and six E195 (107 seats).

The three E170s are in the process of being retired and will be replaced by four marginally larger E175s. However, the latter model will also only be there on a temporary basis, said Foster.

The E195s, three of which came from an aborted order from Belarussian state carrier Belavia and three from lessor AerCap, are in different seating configurations, but will be standardised on the 107-seat layout, consisting of 11 business-class and 96 economy-class seats.

The E190s have only nine seats fewer, which Foster conceded was: "Not much of a gap. Over time, we will probably want to standardise on 98 and do something different with the 195s."

Airlink's main domestic competitor, low-cost carrier FlySafair, operates Boeing 737-800s and "that sets the benchmark from a unit cost perspective, which gives them the ability to lead on [ticket] price."

As a result, Airlink will have to follow suit and operate narrowbodies with more capacity than the Embraers, said Foster.

"We need to do it at some point. We need to be mindful of timing. The narrowbody market has firmed considerably, mainly because the challenges of the [Pratt & Whitney] geared turbofan engine that has slowed down production of the [Airbus] A320neo, and [Boeing 737] MAXs have had their challenges as well."

Delays in delivering new-generation single-aisle jets, together with engine problems once in service have produced great demand for earlier-generation 737-800s and -700s, which have mature, more reliable power plants.

With the price of the used, older-generation aircraft having hardened considerably, "We don't want to be locked into long-term leases that, over time, become uncompetitive compared to the benchmark."

However, said Foster, Airlink would make the step up to the larger aircraft "when the time is right".

He praised the E190 as "an exceptionally

competent aircraft" that could cope with a wide variety of routes, including the long over-sea sector to the UK South Atlantic island dependency of St Helena and the equally demanding airport at Pietermaritzburg, whose runway is short, narrow and undulating, as well as being set within surrounding high ground.

The E190's range and payload/range capabilities are good he added and its smaller size compared to narrowbodies meant that it could be operated at high frequencies to destinations.

As for the smaller ERJ135s and 140s, "We have great reliability out of the aircraft and they're good assets. Just on that basis, we see there's still economic life in the fleet. They're

distant regional centres such as Nairobi or Dar-es-Salaam.

The company is expanding beyond South Africa, but is cautious about setting up new bases in its own name. In Namibia, it has taken a 40 per cent stake in a joint venture with newcomer Fly Namibia, whose management has adopted Airlink's franchise system. "We hope that will be viable in the not-too-distant future and we think that could be repeatable."

Over time, Foster believes that Fly Namibia will set up a series of what he describes as 'mini-starburst' networks out of locations such as Walvis Bay, perhaps to places such as Victoria Falls and Harare.

Looking further afield, Foster has reservations

about the current state of Africa's civil aviation scene. "It's a vast continent of 55 countries, 55 sets of rule and regulations, 55 regulators, more than 400 airlines. It has 1.4 billion people, but average GDP is less than \$2,000. That means that not many people on the continent yet have the ability to move around it, or beyond it, by air.

Even in South Africa, only a fraction of the country's approximately 70 million population can afford to fly.

The Single African Air Travel Market (SAATM), agreed by most of Africa's nations, is designed to sweep away many of the bureaucratic regulations and restrictions hampering air transport on the continent.

But while the intention of creating an 'Open Skies' system where airlines can fly wherever they want is laudable, the system is flawed, Foster said.

Many countries have availed themselves of the new rights under SAATM to fly in and out of South Africa, but had not allowed the same freedom to South Africa to operate in their own countries.

"We need to be pushing back on that. We have to get access to markets where we've been blocked, or block those that have already availed themselves of access to South Africa. There needs to be equality and, at the moment, there isn't."

There have been rumours for some time that major Middle East carrier Qatar Airways plans to make a significant investment in Airlink. Foster is notably cautious on this matter, saying that the best person to answer questions on this is Qatar Airways Group CEO, Badr Mohammed Al Meer.

"We don't have a binding contract with any of our 36 airline partners. That's not to say we're not talking to any or all of them." ▲



Airlink Embraer E190 (aircraft climbing): The Embraer E190 is destined to be the mainstay of Airlink's future fleet, with smaller, previous-generation Embraer ERJ 135s /140s (below) retained for developing new routes and providing high frequencies.

IMAGES: AIRLINK



excellent as route development vehicles and for providing good frequency."

The fleet has perhaps six to eight more years ahead of it. When they eventually retire, the E175 could be their possible replacement, "but we have to think how close the 175 is to the 190; you want to create an entry-gauge aircraft.

"Fleet planning is quite a topical thing at Airlink at the moment. There are lots of options to what [the future fleet] looks like."

Equally important is the future shape of Airlink's route network. Most markets are fully serviced, but Airlink sees certain routes in the region where it can compete by leveraging the power of its network, for example, by funnelling traffic into its hubs at Johannesburg and Cape Town, then connecting it to flights to more

# EMBRAER'S AFRICAN ADVENTURE

*Embraer's jets are becoming increasingly popular in Africa as carriers seek cost-efficient solutions to develop their networks, including the next-gen E2 family.*

From Cape Town to Casablanca, Embraer E-Jets and ERJ family jets are an increasingly common sight in Africa's skies, helping to boost the manufacturer's airline footprint across the continent.

It is a market Embraer has focused on strongly believing that its global sales philosophy of "right-sizing, boosting connectivity and replacing inefficient older aircraft with more fuel-efficient modern types is a perfect fit for African carriers," explained Stephan Hannemann, Vice-President Sales & Marketing and Head of Middle East & Africa at the Brazilian aerospace firm.

"The relevance of regional jets in the segment up to 150-seats in Africa is growing and we've increased our fleet 15% since 2019 proving the strong market fit of our products," added Hannemann.

"Embraer now has about 220 aircraft operating in Africa with some 70 customers," he said. Embraer forecasts the delivery of over 300 new aircraft in its segment in the next 20 years, and to some 660 if the Middle East is included.

While the manufacturer's key desire is to sell new E1 and E2 jets in Africa, it is an existing Embraer aircraft, the 35-50 seat ERJ that has proved the perfect entry-level jet for smaller markets. "ERJs have helped us to support airlines building up their business models and then transition to E-Jets," said Hannemann.

South Africa's Airlink is a good example as it has built frequencies and connections from its Johannesburg hub to many smaller destinations such as George Airport to the east of Cape Town. It has a fleet of 28 ERJ-140s and is adding E-Jets with almost 40 in service today.

Embraer's sales and support strategy in Africa is to be tight with every customer with a localised team and offering as many maintenance shops and training operations in region as possible. "Our team supports a customer with 1-2 aircraft in the same way as those with 10 or more, and



**Stephan Hannemann, Vice-President Sales & Marketing and Head of Middle East & Africa at Embraer, sees a bright future for the Brazilian manufacturer's E-Jets in Africa.**

IMAGE: EMBRAER

we do not differentiate between a new or a pre-owned transaction," said Hannemann.

The focus is now shifting to the next-gen E2 family, which Embraer attests has an excellent fit to the needs of African airlines. "The largest member, the E195-E2, offers an unbeatable proposition in terms of unit-cost in line with next-gen narrowbody aircraft, whilst offering a range of up to 7h flying, with extra-large cabin bins and luggage space. All keeping our 2-by-2 seating configuration," said Hannemann.

As Embraer pursues sales campaigns with the likes of Airlink and Royal Air Maroc, as those carriers, among others, prepare fleet renewals and expand their networks, the region has several big challenges and opportunities, explained Hannemann.

"Africa's infrastructure costs, such as airports and ATC, plus fuel prices that are often double the global average, are hitting airline profitability. This is a major challenge," he said. "On the other hand, there are major opportunities around the rightsizing of aircraft to better match supply and demand.

"Our analysis shows that only 29% of all intra-African flights operate with a daily frequency or more. There is a huge opportunity to increase connectivity, stimulating travel and trade," he stated.

"One area that has improved significantly is aircraft financing, with many lessors supporting African carriers and great interest from regional banks in financing new aircraft. Financing is not nearly the challenge it once was – there are many more solutions today," he said.

Hannemann's ambition for Embraer in Africa over the coming five years is clear: "I want to see us utilising our very strong relationships and understanding of the needs of airlines to help unleash the great potential of African carriers, fulfilled by moving a lot of airlines into the E2 programme." ▲

▼ **Our analysis shows that only 29% of all intra-African flights operate with a daily frequency or more. There is a huge opportunity to increase connectivity, stimulating travel and trade.** ▲  
**STEPHAN HANNEMANN**

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IMAGE: AIR SEYCHELLES

Carrying the Creole spirit, Air Seychelles has been deftly and steadily building a solid and sustainable growth strategy by capitalising on a niche market: ecotourism. **Anuradha Deenapanray Chappard** finds out how sustainability is inscribed in the Seychelles' and its national airline's DNA.



## Seychelles turning the Ocean green

Small island developing states (SIDS) are the most disaster-prone countries in the world. Climate change adaptation has been on Seychelles' national agenda since 1992. Over the past decades, the country has developed broad national policies, roadmaps and strategies to face this challenging issue.

It is committed to reducing economy-wide absolute greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 293.8 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e in 2030 (26.4 per cent) compared with its business as usual (BAU) scenario.

It is also increasing its mitigation contribution and improving its strategies with a particular emphasis on Seychelles' blue economy, enabled by technology, financing and capacity building.

The net-zero emissions economy by 2050 target depends on a progressive shift to low carbon transport. Seychelles has thus designed a roadmap for the phased transition to a circular economy for the years 2030 to 2040.

The tourism and transport sectors are prime components of the nationally-determined contribution for climate change adaptation. International and national efforts combined seek to reduce overall GHG emissions from tourism by 20 per cent per visitor/day by 2030.

As a key contributor to the archipelago's development, Air Seychelles has integrated sustainable practices into its daily operations to

minimise carbon footprints in the local environment and across its network.

Key initiatives are: a fuel-efficient fleet of Airbus A320neo aircraft, which significantly reduces emissions; endemic bird naming and species conservation (support to the Seychelles National Parks Authority to save endangered bird species from extinction) and investment in communities where it operates, emphasising sustainable development and environmental awareness.

The carrier operates regionally from its home in Mahe to Tel Aviv, Johannesburg, Mumbai, Mauritius, and Colombo with Airbus A320neos. Domestically, the carrier operates up to 30 round trips per day to Praslin and charters to other islands on its Twin Otter fleet.

In 2023, Air Seychelles was awarded the 'World's leading airline to the Indian Ocean', 'Indian Ocean's leading airline economy class' and 'Indian Ocean's leading airline brand'.

As a signatory to the Yamoussoukro decision, Seychelles is pursuing the air services liberalisation process for a competitive market.

Air Seychelles' strategic partnership with Turkish Airlines has thus strengthened its footprint in the region through a well-defined route development and fleet renewal strategy.

The financial problems of other airlines in the region has been a blessing in disguise for Air Seychelles.

The airline is determined to fly further with a proactive green vision. ▲

### SOMMAIRE

## LES SEYCHELLES RENDENT L'Océan VERT

*Porteuse de l'esprit créole, Air Seychelles a su construire avec efficacité et régularité une stratégie de croissance solide et durable en capitalisant sur un marché de niche : l'écotourisme. La durabilité est inscrite dans l'ADN des Seychelles et de son porte-drapeau.*

L'adaptation au changement climatique est à l'ordre du jour national des Seychelles depuis 1992. Le pays s'est engagé à réduire les émissions absolues de gaz à effet de serre (GES) de 293,8 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e à l'échelle de l'économie en 2030 (26,4 %) par rapport au scénario de maintien du statu quo.

Les Seychelles ont élaboré une feuille de route pour la transition progressive vers une économie circulaire sur la période 2030 -2040, et à une économie à zéro émission nette en 2050.

En tant que contributeur clé au développement de l'archipel, Air Seychelles a intégré des pratiques durables pour réduire son empreinte carbone sur l'environnement local et sur l'ensemble de son réseau. Les principales initiatives sont : une flotte d'A320neo économe en carburant, qui réduit considérablement les émissions, dénomination des oiseaux endémiques et conservation des espèces, et

investissement dans les communautés qu'elle dessert.

Le transporteur opère au niveau régional depuis son siège de Mahé vers Tel Aviv, Johannesburg, Mumbai, Maurice et Colombo avec des Airbus A320neo.

En 2023, Air Seychelles a reçu les prix suivants : « Meilleure compagnie aérienne au monde vers l'océan Indien », « Meilleure compagnie aérienne de l'océan Indien en classe économique » et « Meilleure marque de compagnie aérienne de l'océan Indien ».

En tant que signataire de la décision de Yamoussoukro, les Seychelles poursuivent le processus de libéralisation des services aériens.

Son partenariat stratégique avec Turkish Airlines a renforcé sa présence dans la région grâce à une stratégie reposant sur le développement des routes et de renouvellement de sa flotte. ▲

Les compagnies aériennes tunisiennes ont annoncé un plan de vol estival ambitieux avec de nouvelles routes et un renforcement de leur flotte. Voyons les mesures prises par Tunisair et Nouvelair avec **Anuradha Deenapanray Chappard**.

IMAGE: AIRBUS - D VELUPILLAI



Tunisair et Nouvelair ont annoncé des plans de vols ambitieux pour l'été.

# TUNISAIR EST PRÊTE À FLEURIR CET ÉTÉ



IMAGE: AIRBUS - C BRINKMANN

Les compagnies aériennes tunisiennes ont anticipé une forte activité touristique pour cet été et souhaitent faciliter le flux de la diaspora.

La compagnie nationale Tunisair a programmé plus de 17 000 vols soit environ 2,7 millions de sièges. Cela représente une hausse de 19% par rapport à la saison estivale 2023. La reprise a été observée en 2023 suite à une hausse de 20% du nombre de passagers. Cela confirme bien la reprise du secteur touristique. Elle sera plus élevée en 2024 d'après les estimations.

Lors de l'annonce des résultats en début d'année, le PDG de Tunisair a tout de même affirmé que la compagnie nationale « revient de loin ». Le plan de restructuration est toujours en cours d'exécution (diminution de la dette, plan social, digitalisation, remise en service et renforcement de la flotte d'avions, nouvelles routes à l'international).

Pour assurer son plan de vol, Tunisair a mis un coup d'accélérateur sur les activités MRO de ses avions.

En parallèle, Tunisair a amélioré son offre en rouvrant des routes régulières comme un vol hebdomadaire sur Lisbonne, deux vols par semaine entre Tunis et Zurich, et un vol hebdomadaire à partir de Djerba. Nantes vient également étoffer son réseau.

Le programme comprend également l'augmentation des fréquences sur plusieurs destinations françaises : Lyon, Marseille, Nice et Paris-Orly. Tunisair renforce aussi son réseau africain avec davantage de vols vers Bamako, Casablanca, Conakry, Oran ou encore Tripoli. Une augmentation des vols est également opérée sur Istanbul, Madrid et Venise.

Tunisair souhaite accélérer son redressement. Elle envisage d'ouvrir d'autres routes à l'international sur la Chine et les États-Unis d'ici 2026.

De son côté, la première compagnie privée du pays Nouvelair a récemment dévoilé un plan de développement ambitieux pour consolider son réseau avec de nouvelles routes sur le marché européen.

Selon Chokri Zarrad, son directeur général, ces

nouvelles routes s'inscrivent « dans la stratégie de croissance entamée en 2023 avec le lancement de 15 lignes étendues sur cinq pays ».

Nouvelair desservira ainsi Barcelone, Madrid et Hambourg avec deux vols hebdomadaires, Bruxelles au départ de Monastir et Casablanca (3 vols hebdomadaires). La compagnie propose ainsi près de 40 villes pour satisfaire pleinement l'engouement et les besoins de voyage de ses clients.

La compagnie aérienne privée tunisienne opère depuis Tunis, Monastir et Djerba. Elle propose des vols vers plus de 130 aéroports dans plus de 30 pays sur trois continents.

Ces mesures étaient très attendues car le transport aérien fait encore face à des difficultés financières et à la concurrence malgré un regain de dynamisme.

Point essentiel : le consensus autour du poids que pèse ce secteur indispensable à la connectivité et comme vecteur de croissance. ▲

## SUMMARY

### TUNISAIR SET TO BLOOM IN SUMMER

Tunisair has announced ambitious summer flight plans featuring new routes while the privately-owned Nouvelair airline is also enhancing its international route network.

Strong tourist activity for the North African country means that its national airline has scheduled more than 17,000 flights – around 2.7-million seats - representing an increase of 19% over the figure from 2023 which itself saw a 20% boost over the previous year.

Tunisair is also enhancing its offer to passengers by reopening regular routes such as a weekly flight to Lisbon, two flights each week between Tunis and Zurich, and a weekly flight from Djerba.

The ongoing programme also includes increased frequencies to several French destinations including Lyon, Marseilles, Nice and Paris-Orly while the airline is also strengthening

its African network with more flights to Bamako, Casablanca, Conakry, Oran and Tripoli as well as increased European flights to Istanbul, Madrid and Venice.

For its part, the country's first private airline, Nouvelair, recently unveiled ambitious development plans to consolidate its network with new European routes. According to Chokri Zarrad, its general director, these new routes are part of the airline's growth strategy initiated in 2023 with the launch of 15 routes across five countries.

Nouvelair will now serve Barcelona, Madrid and Hamburg with two weekly flights; and Brussels from Monastir and Casablanca with three weekly flights. The airline now offers flights to around 40 cities from its bases in Tunis, Monastir and Djerba, offering flights to more than 130 airports in more than 30 countries on three continents. ▲



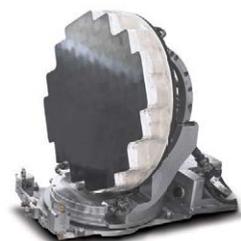
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*Within 10 years of being founded, FlySafair has rapidly grown to become the dominant domestic airline in South Africa, having more than 60 per cent of the intensely-competitive market. **Guy Leitch** asked CEO **Elmar Conradie** how he has accomplished such strong growth and simultaneously achieved significant awards.*

## The secrets of on-time travel...

When asked how the airline achieved the world-best on-time performance (OTP) award, Conradie said: “Essentially, through a lot of hard work, dedication and attention to detail. Our teams really understand the importance of a great OTP to our operation and so everyone does their part.

“We’re very conscious of examining any delays that do happen to ensure that we isolate and address the root cause as quickly as possible.

“Managing our own maintenance also allows us to keep that same level of discipline through that element of the operation to ensure that our technical dispatch reliability is as good as it possibly can be. It comes down to focusing on it every day and every flight and taking the customer experience seriously.”

FlySafair has rapidly outgrown the South African domestic market. Eleven regional destinations in Africa have been approved by the International Air Services Licencing Council. Yet the airline is currently only flying to five destinations outside South Africa. When asked how many of these routes are still not operational, and when he expects to use all the rights, Conradie replied: “We’d like to look to expand to a few more of the approved destinations. At present, we are finalising schedules for the next IATA season and determining the availability of incoming aircraft for later in the year, so we’ll make our final determinations in the next few months.”

FlySafair flies only Boeing NG narrow-bodies. Given that pilots like to move up to newer and larger aircraft, is pilot retention a problem?

“Managing a crew complement is always a challenging task. Over the past 10 years, we’ve realised that there will always be a quotient of crew who will come and go, and so one needs to have a robust system to recruit, train and promote on an on-going basis.

“We have been gradually renewing our fleet over the past few years, even replacing some of the older NG aircraft. We also now fly a mostly NG fleet.”

With a strong post-Covid expansion in capacity, there were fears that there was now an oversupply of seats in the South African domestic market. Conradie said: “Not at this



▼ **We’re very conscious of examining any delays that do happen to ensure that we isolate and address the root cause as quickly as possible.** ▲  
**ELMAR CONRADIE**

stage. The domestic market has not yet recovered to the pre-Covid 2019 numbers. The airline industry is operating in a sustainable equilibrium with lower seat numbers.

“The hope is that the size of the market grows in time with the South African economy. There’s not much scope for additional capacity in the market at the moment, but we don’t believe that the market is in a space of unsustainable over-supply right now.”

The airline has been engaging in fleet consolidation. Conradie noted: “We have a target age and price range for the incoming fleet, so each time we bring a new aircraft in, it will tend to be younger than one that went out. And we still operate four Boeing 737-400s, so there’s room for an update there.”

The airline has once again been under pressure from competitors about its ownership composition, which is restricted to 25 per cent non-resident ownership by the South African licencing authorities. Conradie said that “the matter is still subject to scrutiny by the air services licencing councils, but we remain confident that we were never in contravention of any requirements”.

Given that, historically, private airlines in South Africa have complained about an ‘un-level playing field’, the question that arises is whether that is still the problem with SAA V2.0 and the industry regulators.

Conradie said: “There’s nothing specific that I’m aware of that would have me airing concern, but as with any industry, we only ask for equal treatment regardless of whether we are state-owned or private.” ▲

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Against many observers' expectations, South African Airways (SAA) has celebrated its 90th birthday. It has had a difficult past 10 years. **Guy Leitch** takes a closer look.

# Can SAA grasp this opportunity for survival?

**A**t the end of 2019, SAA collapsed financially and was forced into business rescue. Then, Covid-19 arrived and it looked as though the beleaguered airline would be beyond rescue. However, as the sole shareholder, the South African government was determined not to let this prized state asset die.

The government pumped in more than R36 billion (US\$2 billion) to pay-off creditors and relaunch a much slimmed-down airline: 'SAA V2'.

In justifying this massive bailout, the SA government committed to finding a private sector strategic equity partner (SEP) to take a 51 per cent share of the airline, effectively privatising it.

In due course an SEP buyer was identified – the Takatso Consortium. However the conclusion of the SEP deal encountered numerous obstacles and delays culminating in the competition commission's objection to the share owned by Global Airways and thus SAA competitor Lift Airlines – who eventually withdrew from the consortium.

Finally, in March 2024, the Takatso deal was cancelled, once again calling into question the viability of the airline.

Guy Leitch asked SAA's interim CEO, Professor John Lamola, what the effects of the cancellation of the Takatso deal will be on the airline, and the SAA group.

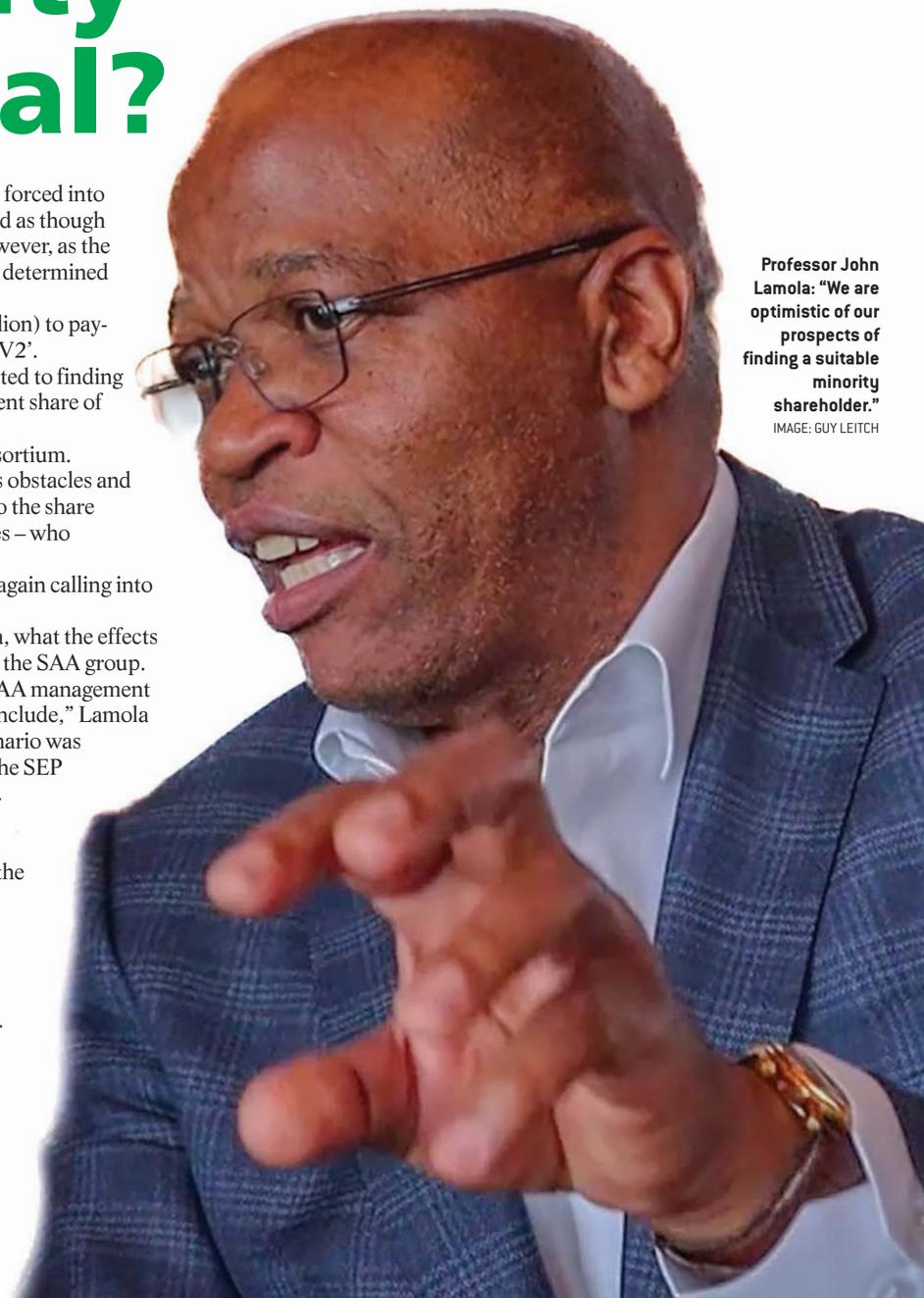
"Due to the protracted nature of financial transactions, the SAA management team devised a risk mitigation strategy should the deal fail to conclude," Lamola said. "The strategy considered three scenarios: 1) Our ideal scenario was that the SEP transaction was consummated by April 2024. 2) The SEP transaction continued to drag on. 3) The SEP transaction failed.

"When the minister announced the collapse of the SEP negotiations with Takatso we adapted our business plans to the scenario we had considered for the absence of an SEP. Some of the changes included delaying our fleet and network plan including the relaunch of intercontinental routes to Europe and USA," he said.

With the collapse of the Takatso deal, the government proposed that a minority 20 per cent private sector shareholder be found. When asked if he was optimistic that the right partner would be found, Lamola said: "Now that the SEP matter has been settled, we can confidently approach the capital markets with certainty as a 100 per cent state-owned company.

"Based on the revalued SAA with a debt-free balance sheet and an unencumbered property portfolio worth roughly R6 billion (US\$325.6m) – we are optimistic of our prospects of finding a suitable minority shareholder, and even medium-term funding from banks, if so required."

Continued  
on Page 24 ▲



Professor John Lamola: "We are optimistic of our prospects of finding a suitable minority shareholder."  
IMAGE: GUY LEITCH



Under business rescue, the airline lost almost all its widebody fleet – apart from an Airbus A340-600 (pictured) and an A330-200.

IMAGE: SAA

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23**

SAA has been very measured – some critics say slow – to rebuild its long-haul route network and widebody fleet. Since emerging from business rescue, it has only restarted the Sao Paulo route, and, in April this year, the Perth route.

When asked about how the two long-haul routes are doing, Lamola replied, “The performance of the Sao Paulo route has been a remarkable success, exceeding our own expectations.

“The inaugural flight to Perth achieved an impressive load factor, affirming the strength of our strategic decision. The robust forward bookings further validate our choice to establish Perth as our second intercontinental destination following Sao Paulo, marking a significant triumph in our expansion efforts.”

When asked which long-haul routes the airline was planning to open next, Lamola hedged his bets by saying: “We will share that information when we unveil the next new long-haul destination.”

Under business rescue, the airline lost almost all its widebody fleet – apart from an Airbus A340-600 and an A330-200. When asked about the airline’s shortage of competitive long-haul aircraft and fleet expansion plans, Lamola remarked: “Procuring suitable aircraft has been a challenge in an environment where there has been a shortage of aircraft globally. This is not only an SAA challenge. Fortunately, our situation is not acute. We are rolling out a plan that includes deploying two additional Airbus A330s this financial year.”

One of the objectives of the SEP deal was to strengthen the SAA balance sheet, so that state guarantees would no longer be required for aircraft leases. With the SEP deal not happening, Lamola was asked if the balance sheet was strong enough for competitive leases without a state guarantee. He replied: “Our balance sheet is in fact very strong. As mentioned above, there is now certainty on the SEP matter, plus our

balance sheet is debt free, with a substantial property portfolio, which we hope to leverage for future financing needs.”

SAA has, for the past 25 years, been an Airbus-only airline. Given this legacy, and Boeing’s current problems, Lamola was asked if they would consider Boeing. “We are researching fleet options to develop a request for proposals with all OEMs,” he replied.

Given the slow pace of SAA’s return to many long-haul routes, the question arises as to whether SAA is having problems justifying its unused Heathrow slots, and its latent codesharing/interline partnerships.

Lamola noted: “We are not experiencing any problems with holding on to current slots. Partnerships and alliances form part of our growth and expansion strategy and Heathrow is key to that, and to the inherent value in the SAA business.”



It had been expected that the SEP deal would inject key human resource skills which the airline had lost during its restructuring. With the ending of the SEP deal, SAA started advertising for key staff.

The airline remains state-owned and small, with critics expressing doubts as to its viability. Lamola was therefore asked if they are able to attract the right calibre skills. He replied: “We remain competitive in the aviation talent market, as evidenced by our ability to retain talent, and we are in a continuous search for great aviation talent.”

The government’s black economic empowerment requirements have been seen as a possible hindrance to attracting the best talent (which may not be black). Lamola noted though that SAA is in fact open to recruiting the best talent globally.

Lamola was initially appointed as non-executive chairman, but also took on the role of interim CEO in 2022. There is speculation that

he will make himself available for the permanent CEO position.

He pointed out that: “The current SAA executive is an interim structure. It was used as a stop-gap measure until the SEP took the reins of the airline. Now that the SEP is out of the picture, the board will consider both internal and external candidates to fill the advertised permanent positions to bring about leadership stability.”

There is considerable debate as to whether state-owned airlines should be purely profit driven. When asked if he was confident that the new slimmed-down SAA V2.0 can operate sustainably, or profitably, or merely aim to cover its cost of capital, he said that “SAA 2.0 will be able to operate sustainably”.

One of the reasons advanced for SAA remaining a state-owned airline is that it fulfils a development mandate. When asked whether the airline is currently meeting any development mandate objectives that are uneconomic – that is, which make it more difficult to be profitable, Lamola said: “We do not measure developmental and transformative achievement only in monetary terms. Our growth and route expansion plans are measured and well-considered – considering their financial viability, which is a critical aspect in SAA 2.0.”

SAA is not just an airline – it has two subsidiaries: SAA Technical – for maintenance and Air Chefs, for in-flight catering. Lamola says that the performance of the subsidiaries as integral service providers to SAA is pleasing, and they are also expanding into third-party services providers.

Finally, in response to assertions that there is a global pilot shortage, and thus whether SAA is having trouble attracting pilots and maintaining competency checks, Lamola noted that: “We have managed to recruit pilots since April 2023 and most have completed their currency and other route checks. For example, the African female first officer who flew the inaugural flight to Perth is one of these.”

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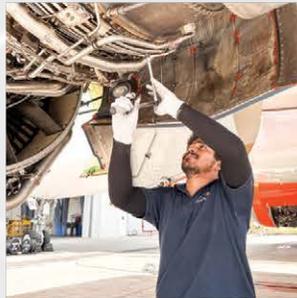
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## TROUBLE AT THE DOUBLE IN SOMALI AIRSPACE

Two rival air authorities in the Horn of Africa are creating potentially dangerous conditions for airlines traversing the region.

Airline pilots must be able to trust absolutely the instructions they receive from air traffic controllers. Which makes recent incidents over Somalia a matter of concern.

Pilots of aircraft passing over the troubled country, which has been wracked by civil war for more than 30 years, have been receiving conflicting instructions from rival controllers in Somalia and the self-declared country of Somaliland to the north. The problem affects aircraft flying within about 150nm of Hargeisa, Somaliland's main city.

The official air traffic control (ATC) authority for the area is based in Mogadishu, Somalia's capital, which also gives its name to the area's ATC flight information region (FIR).

However, New Zealand-based OPSGROUP, which monitors risks to airline operations, says that it has received "at least 10 reports of aircraft within the Mogadishu FIR being contacted by a second 'controller' on the same frequency, issuing conflicting instructions.

"Crews have been issued climb and descent clearances that are not from the sector controller."

The cause of the problem is a political dispute



Controllers from Somalia and Somaliland have both claimed to be the official air traffic controllers from Mogadishu Flight Information Region.

IMAGE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

between Somalia and Somaliland. The latter region emerged out of the country's long civil war, but is not recognised internationally.

Earlier this year, both countries claimed authority over the Mogadishu FIR.

OPSGROUP says that Somaliland "has to date maintained control over its airports, but Somalia controls the upper airspace from Mogadishu".

The situation was worsened in February after Somaliland signed an agreement with neighbouring Ethiopia, with the latter granting port rights on Somaliland's Red Sea coast.

In response, Somalia began restricting movements into Somaliland by denying airspace

entry to the Mogadishu FIR in some instances. Retaliating in turn, Somaliland declared its right to exercise control over its airspace.

Conflicting instructions from different controllers – who both claim to be 'Mogadishu Control' – obviously present potentially serious risks to airliners.

IATA says that the Somali civil aviation authorities have issued a NOTAM with protocols for aircrew to follow if they receive conflicting ATC instructions, telling pilots to contact Mogadishu Control through alternative radio channels, such as satellite communications, to verify clearances. ▲

## EGYPTAIR CHANGES GEAR AND SELLS ON AIRBUS A220-300



Axed: EgyptAir's A220-300s.  
IMAGE: EGYPTAIR

EgyptAir has disposed of its Airbus A220-300s, after having experienced significant problems with the fleet's Pratt & Whitney PW1000G geared-turboprop (GTF) powerplants.

Egypt's flag-carrier sold the 12 A220-300s, which were only between three and four years old, in February this year to lessor Azorra. The airline initially bought the A220s for its EgyptAir Express regional division, replacing Embraer E170s.

EgyptAir's experience with the aircraft was less than happy. The first aircraft was delivered in December 2019, but the fleet experienced a significant problem with the combustion chamber of

the GTF powerplants. This was sufficiently serious to require the unscheduled replacement of no fewer than 15 of the 24 engines on the wing within the first two years of their service, according to the then-chairman of EgyptAir Holding Company, captain Amr Abu Elenin, who revealed the problems to *Arabian Aerospace* magazine at the 2021 Dubai airshow.

EgyptAir's problems with the engines have been replicated across several airlines, but the harsh operating conditions of the Middle East are thought to have worsened the Egyptian company's experience.

Florida-based Azorra said it was acquiring the aircraft "to support [EgyptAir's] ongoing fleet transformation."

"Our strong partnerships with Airbus and Pratt & Whitney have been key to facilitating this creative transaction," Azorra founder and CEO, John Evans, said. "These young, well-maintained aircraft with freshly-overhauled, updated engines from Pratt & Whitney have strong market demand and are very attractive to Azorra's rapidly-growing customer base."

The reference to the upgraded engines was significant, given EgyptAir's problems with the powerplants.

Pratt & Whitney said at the time of the initial reports of problems that there had been issues with "early-generation hardware, with upgrades identified to bring them to the latest design standard that will increase durability and time on wing."

In the February 1 statement, Evans said Azorra's purchase of the A220s would "provide a fleet transition solution, while clearing the path for new Airbus widebody aircraft."

Azorra said the addition of the 12 aircraft from EgyptAir complemented the lessor's existing A220 orderbook, "with the majority already placed with airline customers across the globe." ▲



Country manager, Nigeria, Air France-KLM, Christine Quantin and Nigeria's minister of aviation and aerospace development, Festus Keyamo, during a courtesy visit to Keyamo by the airline's team, where the minister appealed for equitable fare pricing for Nigerian travelers.

# NIGERIA BATTLES FOR ROUTES TO MARKET

**Chukwu Emeke**  
*finds out what aeropolitics has done to Nigerian-registered airlines.*

**A**eropolitics is a critical part of the global aviation system that highlights the politics involved in access to international air links and borders. It is this intrinsic link between aviation and politics that has, over the years, exposed many Nigeria-registered airlines to the challenges experienced in their efforts to implement bilateral air services agreements (BASAs).

Nigeria has BASAs with more than 78 countries. Yet, out of the 23 active domestic airlines, only four out of those designated for regional and international flights are currently implementing those operations.

The designated airlines include Air Peace, Arik Air, Overland Airways, Ibom Air and United Nigeria Airlines.

Efforts by some of the airlines to operate scheduled flights from Nigeria to west coast cities were initially met with constraining conditions and obstructed the route expansion plans of some of the airlines.

Air Peace, for example, could not commence flights to Lome, Togo until 2023. As at 2019 when Air Peace had 16 international destination slots and 17 regional slots, securing approval from particularly, Francophone West African countries was very difficult.

Asky from Togo was offering four flights to Lagos daily, but Air Peace was not granted approval by the Togolese authorities until the chairman, Allen Onyema, threatened to go to court and the authorities apologised.



When Cote'd Ivoire authorities initially granted permission to Air Peace, no airport office was provided for the airline and USD\$10,000 was among the charges the airline was asked to pay. It was much later that permissions were granted.

On the inter-continental routes, the politics of market protectionism has worked against Nigerian airlines and pushed some of them out of the international routes and out of operations. Medview Airlines until March 2018, operated the Lagos-London and Lagos-Dubai routes under multiple operational hurdles and resistance from aviation authorities in those countries, as they did everything to dissuade Medview and encourage their own airlines.

Medview was the only surviving Nigerian airline on the Lagos-London route after the exit of Arik Air from London, New York and Johannesburg routes in 2017. Medview's aircraft were eventually banned from operating into the regions. Today, the airline is not flying.

Medview's managing director, Muneer Bankole, said governments of those countries do all sorts of things to resist having Nigerian airlines compete with theirs.

Many Nigerian aviation stakeholders believe that foreign airlines that have secured flights from Nigeria to their countries have always, through their conduct in cahoots with aviation authorities of their home countries, what Onyema described as an "unspoken alliance", proved that they do not want Nigerian airlines to compete with them.

They introduce obstacles using their embassies, their airports, handling companies and other players to frustrate Nigerian airlines' efforts to reciprocate their flights to Nigeria.



Despite the international travel culture of Nigerians, Nigeria loses huge foreign exchange to international air transport because Nigerian airlines are not major players. Besides, the sector has not been able to live up to expectations in terms of contributions to GDP for this reason.

The United Kingdom has 21 slots into Nigeria per week. British Airways is operating 14 slots. Air Peace has slots for seven daily flights into Gatwick and on March 30, 2024, commenced the direct flights, starting with low fares and reducing the existing business class fares from US\$15,000 (N15million) to US\$4,000 (N4million) at N1,000 per dollar.

Narrating the airline's experience at Gatwick Airport, Onyema said in a television interview: "Within 24 hours, those foreign airlines reduced their fares to N5million."

Air Peace believes the intention was to force the airline out of the route and increase the fares again.

"It's a very devilish conspiracy," he said, encouraging other Nigerian airlines to take the step Air Peace has taken. "Yes, international aeropolitics is very dirty but somebody must pay the price," he said.

Sustaining a Nigerian airline on the Lagos-London route is beyond just airline business. It is a game of international aeropolitics involving governments of both countries. According to Onyema, there are already efforts by UK authorities and their agencies at that airport to ensure Air Peace fails to depart on time, the way it is departing on time from the Lagos end.

New Air Botswana chief executive Lulu Rasebotsa has been tasked with returning the country's embattled flag carrier to health. **Mark Pilling** reports .

# Lulu's mission to keep Botswana in with a shout!

**A**ir Botswana head Lulu Rasebotsa is moving quickly to expand the airline's fleet, build its network and put the southern African flag carrier on a stronger footing.

Rasebotsa, who was appointed by the government to lead the state-owned carrier in December 2023, has sourced two Embraer ERJ145s and an E175, and the hunt is on for another E175. The extra capacity is urgently needed to supplement its two ATR72 turboprops and an E170 and stabilise its on-time performance (OTP) and ability to serve its network effectively.

When *African Aerospace* interviewed her at the IATA annual general meeting in Dubai in early June, Rasebotsa was expecting the Embraers to be delivered by the end of July following maintenance. Funding for the pre-owned aircraft, which are being acquired outright, is coming from the government as part of its re-capitalisation of Air Botswana.

A larger fleet is just one element of Rasebotsa's mission to restore the fortunes of a state-owned carrier that has long struggled to turn a profit. "I must affect a turnaround. In my career I've been able to build companies from zero to hero," said Rasebotsa, who has more than 20 years of experience in the financial services industry.



"My approach is that I'm running an enterprise, I'm running a business," she said. "There is a lot to do, including building up the team, restoring staff morale, improving OTP and dealing with poor customer service.

"I have come in and said to the team our employees are at the centre of everything we do because it is my employees that are going to solve things for my customers," said Rasebotsa.

This approach, combined with the fleet update and upgrades in digital technology "will all be underpinned by doing business the right way. And when I say the right way, I mean, compliance, safety, and zero tolerance of corruption," she stated.

Rasebotsa has shareholder backing to undertake a revival of Air Botswana. "My shareholder understands that as a national carrier I am an enabler of the economy," she said.

"My challenge is I want to be a sustainable business, I want to be able to deal with my operational costs, but when it comes to the balance sheet, our acquisition of assets and the maintenance of our assets that's where we need to be funded to a large extent," explained Rasebotsa.

With the new aircraft will come new routes. "Our expansion speaks directly to how we bring tourism to Botswana," she said. It is planning more services from Maun, the tourism capital of north-west Botswana, with routes to Windhoek, the capital of Namibia, Cape Town and Johannesburg on the radar.



There will also be frequency increases on its popular services from capital Gaborone to the South African cities, as well as adding Durban to the network, she said. The aim is to boost the carrier's traffic by up to 10 per cent this year.

The carrier has a workforce of around 350 at present, but this will grow as more flight and cabin crew, plus maintenance specialists, are employed to operate the growing fleet. The plan is to keep all the current fleet to increase the operational resilience of the airline.

Turning the carrier around will take time, and Rasebotsa is confident the government understands this too.

"And I am going to have to be very patient myself. There is a lot to do around the people and my present agenda is around a mindset change.

"And maybe that's why I was brought in because I'm there to run an enterprise. I am very logical and practical in my approach, and I can question, why have you done it this way? Do you think you can do it the other way?" ▲



▼ I must affect a turnaround. In my career I've been able to build companies from zero to hero. ▲  
**LULU RASEBOTSA**

AFRAA hosted its 12th Aviation Stakeholders' Convention and the inaugural Safety Summit in Addis Ababa in mid-May. **Yonathan Menkir Kassa reports.**

# High hopes for African aviation

**Abdérhmane Berthé:**  
There is progress, but for most it is nowhere near fast enough.  
IMAGE: AEROTOPIA



**THE GROWTH PLAN IN NUMBERS**

**1,000 NEW AIRCRAFT**

**69,000 NEW PROFESSIONALS**

**21,000 PILOTS**

**22,000 TECHNICIANS**

**26,000 CABIN CREW**

With the theme of "Beyond Connecting African Aviation" more than 500 delegates from across the continent and beyond attended the African Airlines Association's (AFRAA) 12th Aviation Stakeholders' Convention from May 12-14 in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, followed by the inaugural African Aviation Safety and Operations Summit on May 15.

A major topic was the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), an initiative by the African Union that aims to create a single unified air transport market in Africa. As of now, 34 of the 55 African states have signed up for SAATM.

In addition, there is the protocol on free movement of persons that seeks to establish a visa-free zone within AfCFTA countries, supporting the creation of the African Union passport.

The call to action in Addis Ababa was clear: it is time for full implementation of SAATM, declared Abdérhmane Berthé, AFRAA secretary general. There is progress, but for most it is nowhere near fast enough.

In 2023, Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe joined the initiative, bringing the total number of participating states to 37. The secretariat of the dispute settlement mechanism (DSM) oversaw the recruitment of two experts, with

ongoing efforts to finalise the selection of administrative council members, said Berthé.

Three additional states – Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and São Tomé and Príncipe – signed the memorandum of implementation (MoI) for unconditional adherence to the Yamoussoukro Decision (YD)/SAATM, bringing the total to 26 states.

Fifth freedom traffic capacity in Africa increased from 15 per cent in 2018 to 19 per cent in 2023. The establishment of 59 new intra-Africa routes, including 13 fifth freedom routes, and the hosting of seven SAATM-PIP (pilot implementation project) airshows across the continent, further promoted the benefits of SAATM for continental connectivity and integration.

Audits using SAATM key performance indicators (KPIs) were conducted in 10 states, with four states – Cabo Verde, Rwanda, Cameroon, and Nigeria – having their corrective action plans (CAPs) approved.



Several key initiatives are poised to drive the growth of African aviation: the Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement is set to create the largest free trade area globally, connecting 1.3 billion people across 55 countries with a combined GDP of US\$3.4 trillion.

The convention presented an optimistic forecast for African aviation. Africa's commercial fleet is expected to more than double over the next 20 years, with intra-African passenger traffic anticipated to more than quadruple, placing the continent's growth among the highest globally.

To support this growth, more than 1,000 new aircraft will be required, with 70 per cent being single-aisle aircraft. The demand for aviation personnel is projected to rise significantly, requiring 69,000 new professionals, including 21,000 pilots, 22,000 technicians, and 26,000 cabin crew members.

■ The event was extended by a day to include the inaugural African Aviation Safety and Operations Summit with AFRAA partnering with the Flight Safety Foundation (FSF).

The summit's presentations highlighted a pressing concern – the escalating accident rate in the Africa-Indian Ocean region. Between 2021 and 2022, the accident rate surged from 1.53 to 7.01 per million departures, with the number of accidents increasing from one to six.

In 2023, the accident rate remained high at 6.38 per million departures, significantly above the global average of 2.16 per million departures.

Climate change's impact on aviation safety was a significant topic of discussion. Extreme weather conditions, such as heat waves, floods, and high winds, pose challenges to airport infrastructure and safe operations.

Strategic approaches and action plans to mitigate these risks are necessary, including designing resilient infrastructure and improving operational efficiency.

AFRAA announced that the 13th Stakeholders' Convention will be held in May 2025 in Kigali, Rwanda, and will be hosted by RwandAir.

# EGYPT INTERNATIONAL AIRSHOW

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*Africa desperately needs a long-term and coordinated answer to its problem of MRO capacity and capability. Chuck Grieve looks into recent developments.*



**Stage freight: Casablanca has been selected for a new 777 P2F conversion facility.**  
IMAGE: KMC

all over Africa. The Arabs are talking to us, the Chinese are talking to us, the Americans are talking to us, the Europeans are talking to us.

“Many of them are coming with all kinds of very juicy packages, saying they can build and operate [MROs]. We are aiming to have at least one MRO in all our five major international airports. We can take two in some.”

He said the federal government’s plans might sound “very ambitious” given that some states – Akwa Ibom for example – are also building MRO facilities, but “the more the merrier”, he said. “We’re not going to depend on one facility; one facility cannot take all the aircraft in West

# Why Africa’s MRO needs maintenance

Everyone knows the problems – so far, nobody has the solution. Lack of domestic or nearby MRO capability is killing African airlines, literally.

High operating costs – of which MRO stubbornly remains a disproportionately large part – contributed to the failure and underperformance of Africa-based airlines, Mesfin Tasew, group managing director of Ethiopian Airlines, reminded delegates at a recent MRO Africa conference.

Part of the problem, as he sees it, is a lack of coordination and cooperation among countries. With some nations remaining sceptical about implementation of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), there is “no conducive environment” for airlines to flourish and grow.

Suspicion and protectionist inclinations have landed Ethiopian with accusations of seeking market domination through joint ventures with smaller airlines.



Tasew rejected the accusation, and pointed to his airline’s engagement with Togo’s Asky. He said: “Asky is independent, and it is willing to create an MRO [operation] in Lome, Togo. We ensure they have the right number of skilled professionals.”

His airline was also helping develop capacity to train technicians. The MRO, when ready, would serve the West and Central African markets that currently lack functional aircraft repair facilities.

In Western Africa, Nigeria’s minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Festus Keyamo said attracting MRO operations to Nigeria was “one of our major priorities”.

Speaking on Channels Television’s *Newsnight* programme in April, he did not go into detail other than to say: “International investors are talking to us. We are a place of choice.”

Investors, he said, “realise that Nigeria is a place to establish these MROs so that it can attract customers from



**Mesfin Tasew: “We make sure they have the right number of skilled professionals.”**

IMAGE: ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES



**Festus Keyamo: “Many [investors] are coming with all kinds of very juicy packages.”**

IMAGE: NIGERIAN AVIATION MINISTRY

Africa, Central Africa or part of North Africa – it cannot.”

Morocco, meanwhile, is addressing the global shortage of MRO capacity by providing a business-friendly environment for foreign investment. Quoted in *Africa News*, Abdelhamid Addou, chief executive of Royal Air Maroc, said: “Morocco has a good opportunity and good positioning in terms of the aeronautical industry.”

And while some may consider the North African country because of comparatively cheap labour, government support for aerospace has helped increase access to qualified local talent.

This is a factor in the success enjoyed by Safran, which for some years has operated an engine repair facility in Casablanca, serving airlines from South America to Europe and the Middle East.



Casablanca has recently been selected by a trio of American companies as the site for a Boeing 777 passenger-to-freighter (P2F) conversion line.

The companies, Kansas Modification Center (KMC), Stratos Industries and Integrated Aerospace Alliance (IAA), said in a press release they were “enthusiastic about the prospects that this joint venture presents for each of the partners and the aviation industry in Morocco.”

Stratos will build three widebody hangars at Mohammed V international airport in which KMC and IAA will be able to handle up to eight conversions a year for clients in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Stratos will also build a widebody paint hangar for another partner.

The amount of their investment, build schedules and local employment were not announced. The “North Africa Post” noted the Moroccan government has itself been investing heavily in the aerospace sector to attract foreign businesses. ▲

# LE GABON REJOINT LE AFRIJET-SET

La République gabonaise a réalisé une opération de prise de participation au sein de la compagnie privée Afrijet via sa nouvelle holding Fly Air Gabon. Cette décision répond à des objectifs stratégiques pour bâtir un étendard national et peser davantage sur la croissance nationale. Des détails avec **Anuradha Deenapanray Chappard**.



IMAGE: ATR - PIERRE BARTHE

**L**e Gabon est désormais actionnaire majoritaire de la compagnie aérienne privée Afrijet Business Service, après l'acquisition de 56% d'actions. Elle devient de facto une société nationale.

Afrijet est rentable depuis sa création en 2004 par un groupe d'investisseurs gabonais. La compagnie a développé un modèle hybride (aviation d'affaires et commerciale) réussi au fil des années.

Depuis 2016 Afrijet a tissé un réseau de transport aérien régional solide. Elle est, depuis 2019, la première compagnie aérienne de la Communauté économique et monétaire de l'Afrique centrale (CEMAC).

La compagnie franchit une nouvelle étape avec la décision des autorités gabonaises de mutualiser les savoir-faire et compétences du pays pour bâtir une nouvelle compagnie nationale : Fly Air Gabon. Elle s'appuiera ainsi sur l'expertise, le réseau et les infrastructures existantes d'Afrijet.

« Accueillir l'État et en devenir le porte-drapeau consiste à aligner les stratégies de développement du pays et de l'entreprise. Nous comptons pouvoir réduire nos coûts, et, par là-même, nos prix, sans perdre l'ADN de la gestion privée de la compagnie aérienne », souligne Marc Gaffajoli administrateur général d'Afrijet depuis plus 10 ans.

Soulignons qu'Afrijet et Fly Gabon seront les deux marques d'un même opérateur, l'état gabonais. Il s'agit de mieux desservir l'ensemble des provinces du pays et un plan de remise au standard des aéroports nationaux a été entrepris. Les autorités souhaitent ainsi favoriser le développement des lignes intérieures et améliorer la compétitivité des offres sur le territoire national.

Fly Gabon projette d'acquérir de nouveaux avions moyen-courrier alors qu'Afrijet va consolider sa flotte pour desservir les lignes domestiques et régionales.

Annoncé par le président de la Transition, le Général Brice Oligui Nguema, le projet de création de Fly Gabon s'est concrétisé avec la livraison du premier ATR de la compagnie. L'ATR 72-600 aux couleurs du Gabon (bleu, jaune et vert), orné d'un perroquet gris, symbole du patrimoine faunique, a atterri à l'aéroport de Libreville en mai dernier. Cette première livraison donne non seulement



**Marc Gaffajoli:**  
« Nous comptons pouvoir réduire nos coûts, et, par là-même, nos prix, sans perdre l'ADN de la gestion privée de la compagnie aérienne. »

IMAGE: AFRIJET

de l'espoir mais surtout une nouvelle impulsion au transport aérien gabonais.

De son côté, Afrijet poursuit le développement de son réseau régional avec le lancement de la ligne Libreville-Kinshasa en novembre 2023 et l'inauguration de deux nouvelles agences à Malabo, en Guinée équatoriale, en janvier 2024. Une nouvelle liaison Libreville-Oyem va renforcer la connectivité et le réseau domestique.

Autre avancée majeure, forte de sa certification IOSA obtenue en 2020, Afrijet a signé un accord de coopération commerciale avec Air France, positionnant l'aéroport de Libreville comme une plateforme de correspondance en Afrique Centrale. L'ambition de ce partenariat est de développer le trafic aérien depuis Libreville et d'augmenter la connectivité régionale et internationale (Port-Gentil, Franceville, Bata ou Sao Tomé) à partir du Gabon. Un circuit de transit des passagers simple et rapide a ainsi été mis en place à Libreville.

Après les échecs d'Air Gabon et de Gabon Airlines, la pérennité du transport aérien dépendra de la réussite du partenariat entre une société d'état et un « business model » intégrant des exigences de management privé.

In fine, les parties concernées devraient œuvrer dans l'intérêt du Gabon et de la connectivité africaine. ▲

## SUMMARY

### AFRIJET BECOMES NATIONAL AIRLINE OF GABON

The government of the Gabonese Republic has acquired a 56% majority shareholding in the private airline Afrijet - via its new holding company Fly Air Gabon - so it becomes, in effect, the Central African country's national airline.

Afrijet has been profitable since its creation, in 2004, by a group of Gabonese investors and the company has developed a successful hybrid business and commercial aviation model.

Since 2016 Afrijet has built a solid regional air transport network and for the past five years it has been the leading airline in the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC).

The company is taking a new step with the

decision of the Gabonese authorities to pool the country's know-how and skills to build a new national company, Fly Air Gabon, relying on Afrijet's existing expertise, network and infrastructure.

"Welcoming state ownership - and becoming its standard bearer - involves aligning the development strategies of the country and the company. We intend to reduce costs and thereby prices, without losing the DNA of private management," explains Marc Gaffajoli, general administrator of Afrijet for around ten years.

Fly Gabon plans to acquire new medium-haul aircraft while Afrijet will consolidate its fleet to serve domestic and regional routes. ▲



**Ferris Air** is a company lead by its Founder and Managing Director Michael Muriithi who is an aviator with exposure and expertise in the aviation and the hospitality industry. Ferris Air is venturing into aircraft leasing services and air cargo targeting Africa, the Middle East, and Asia initially.

Their aircraft of choice are the newer generation ATR 72 and Dash 8 aircraft with the new PW 127XT or PW 127M engines which offer lower carbon emissions that is better for our environment, offering better performance, fuel efficiency, low operational costs and lower noise emissions to replace the aging, unsafe fleet currently operating especially in Africa. These aircraft are equipped with the latest in aviation technology and offer superior passenger comfort and safety which Ferris Air is pursuing to purchase and the B767-300F which is currently being on boarded for cargo operations to start imminently into Africa, Middle East and Asia.



The confidence of this venture is informed and encouraged by the recovering passenger traffic, high growth and performance of trade, growing economies and increasing consumer purchasing power in the target market. The opportunities are many and the strategy of Ferris Air is to grow within the selected niche market. In this way Ferris Air can build relationships and partnerships that are long lasting with the authorities, OEM, corporate clients and agents, their goal being to provide high quality services and foster relations based on honesty and trust. Ferris Air is setting out to fill a gap in the aviation industry with focus and dedication to provide our clients with true 24/7 worldwide services with a customer centric approach and service that is on time, every time.

Ferris Air is comprised of a culturally diverse and multilingual team of professionals from every field of the aviation industry. As a young and dynamic company, they understand that their strength lies in their team which includes their partners and agents in the Middle East, Africa and Asia – a fusion of young and seasoned aviation professionals offering decades of quality experience with an innovative approach and a fresh outlook to do different and do better.

Together they are raising the bar because they understand that clients value integrity, transparency, consistency, reliability and efficient services. Their goal will be to provide high quality services and foster amazing client relations.

Ferris Air will use the experience and knowledge of this market segment to do better especially in the area of customer service as well as improving the customer experience and offer value for money.

The company will start with the optimal number of commercial aircraft and then increase gradually after maximum economic utilization. Ferris Air will in September be at the Aviation Africa 2024 in Sandton, Jo'burg, South Africa and the team looks forward to interacting and engaging with participants to know and understand what the market segment in these regions need.

**For those looking for an opportunity to partner with Ferris Air our team's contact details are** michael@ferrisair.co.ke, ben.omari@ferrisair.co.ke, and ops@ferrisair.co.ke



Flight support company MixJet has established a robust presence in Africa, yet there are still plans to expand further. **Marcelle Nethersole** finds out more.

# READY MIX...

**“W**e have ambitious plans for Africa, as we believe our extensive knowledge and experience can be leveraged to establish solid services in many locations across the continent,” said Evgeny Shadov, chief commercial officer at MixJet.

Founded in 2009, MixJet offers a comprehensive range of services including ground handling, aircraft fuelling, permit acquisition, and aircraft charter.

“As a company we pride ourselves on being present even in the most remote areas at the corners of the globe,” said Shadov. “In 2023, we proved to be a key player in the flight support arena by providing our operators with more than 61 million litres of Jet A1 fuel and serving a total of 8,000 flights across different continents.”

Africa is a key continent for the company, and while there are global challenges, Shadov said the African market has consistently proven to be lucrative and remains a focal point for industry growth.

“The majority of our flights to Africa are dedicated to cargo transport, with a particular emphasis on ground-handling services in Niger, Chad, and Mali,” he said.

The company, which has its headquarters in Dubai, also serves several prominent African airlines, including Uganda Airlines, Air Tanzania, Rwanda Air, and Safe Air.

“We also handle permit applications across Africa, covering a wide geographical range from east to west. This extensive network enables us to efficiently obtain the necessary permissions for our operations,” said Shadov.

“In terms of military aviation, we have served various military aircraft from different air forces and their cargo divisions flying to regions across Africa, particularly those involved in ‘Operations Barkhane’ in Mali, Senegal, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Burkina Faso.

“However, due to recent shifts in African-French relations, there has been a significant decrease in military aviation business in Africa. Nevertheless, Niger is now becoming a key hub for the German coalition, and Chad remains important for France, while other regions remain relatively inactive.”

The company also provides support and assistance for aircraft carrying humanitarian cargo during times of floods and famine, including flights to Sudan, Mozambique, and Morocco.

In the business aviation sector, Shadov said he has ‘observed significant transformations’ in Africa.

“New companies are

emerging, and operators are becoming more cost-conscious, while demand for luxury tourism and related travel is increasing,” he explained.

“The expansion of the internet and the competitive landscape have facilitated these shifts, enabling operators to easily locate suppliers, meet demand, and conduct proper market research to adapt to the growing interest.

“Events like AfBAA, which attract numerous executive charter operators seeking to expand their presence, exemplify this trend.”

As expected, the company does face some challenges in Africa, including connectivity. “Issues we experience include underdeveloped infrastructure, higher operational costs compared with other regions, monopolies affecting service quality, payment issues, and communication difficulties in remote areas,” Shadov explained.



However, Shadov said the company has strategic things in place to help overcome these issues.

Overall, the company has “ambitious plans” for Africa, including expanding its network of offices.

Shadov said: “In Q4, we are planning to open a new office in Johannesburg, South Africa, which will further enhance our presence and capabilities in the region. Additionally, we are planning a joint venture with a well-known Middle Eastern supplier to provide fuel in Burundi, marking another significant step in our African operations.

“We are also very committed to sustainability and the implementation of environmental-friendly practices, which we strive to continue. This dedication has been recognised globally, leading to our invitation to participate in COP28 in Dubai.

“In 2023, we launched the Green Horizon initiative, a comprehensive programme aimed at reducing our carbon footprint by 30 per cent by 2030.”

He concluded: “Looking at the bigger picture, MixJet is gearing up for exciting developments beyond Africa as well. We are working on obtaining our Air Operator Certificate (AOC) and plan to charter our own fleet based in Dubai – but that’s another story!” ▲



Evgeny Shadov: “We pride ourselves on being present even in the most remote areas at the corners of the globe.”

IMAGE: MIXJET



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Caverton Helicopters is one of the companies that currently operate in Nigeria.

IMAGE: CAVERTON



## Nigeria taps into growing helo market

*Nigeria's population of more than 200 million people and its vast land mass of over 900,000 square kilometres constitute a huge investment opportunity for the use of helicopters and the services that helicopters offer. However, the market is still largely unexplored as the business years for more investment. Chukwu Emeke reports.*

**B**ecause they can fly almost anywhere, helicopters can be used to transport large objects from place to place, to rescue people in hard-to-reach areas, like mountains or in rough seas, and from disasters such as fires, floods, and earthquakes. They can also fly over cities and provide reports on traffic.

Helicopters are also useful to the police for crime fighting and to the military for surveillance.

Apart from Nigeria's security agencies and paramilitary organisations that use helicopters for their daily operations, there are a handful of Nigerian entrepreneurs who own helipads and helicopters strictly for private movement from place to place.

Nigeria's Niger delta region harbours a lot of oil companies that use helicopters for their operations. However, there has been a gap in revenue generation for the Nigerian government due to an aged neglect of this revenue source as a result of the grey market nature of the sub-sector over the years.

It is to fill this revenue generation void that the Nigerian government recently gave a concessionaire, NAEBI Dynamics Concepts Limited, permission for the collection of helicopter landing levies at all aerodromes, helipads, oil rig platforms and other facilities in Nigeria. There are more than 250 such facilities in Nigeria.

Chief operating officer of NAEBI, Stanley Chike said the company was already making moves to re-fleet its equipment profile. There are investment opportunities for mobile radar tracking devices, body-worn cameras, and a fully-equipped control room amongst other support that will capture and relay data for helicopters flying in and out of Nigeria.

The special assistant to the minister of aviation and aerospace development on special duties, Christopher Omoaghe, said one of the challenges of the ministry is the provision of incorrect schedules and data as well as submission of falsified information by helicopter operators attempting to bypass the system. This is another investment opportunity.

Nigeria needs more private investors in the training of helicopter landing officers to augment the efforts of the existing government aviation training organisations in Nigeria.

The number of helicopters in Nigeria will continue to increase in the years ahead, considering the growing need for the equipment. Emerging technology comes with maintenance demands. Nigeria would require maintenance facilities as the helicopters continue to increase in number.

The director of operations at Nigeria Airspace Management Agency (NAMA), Matthew Pwajok, said helicopter maintenance is another area calling for investment in Nigeria. He also identified opportunities in the leasing of helicopters in a growing market like this.



Nigeria is approaching a food crisis due to insecurity in the farms that has dissuaded farmers from manual agricultural activities. A massive investment in agricultural tasks, such as crop spraying, seed sowing, crop monitoring, and pest control is required in pursuit of the needed volume of food for consumption in Nigeria.

Helicopters are a useful support to the use of drones for crime fighting.

The rate of terrorist attacks, kidnapping for ransom and other crimes in Nigeria recently, requires that the government mulls the idea of localised production of fighter helicopters and drones, part of which possibly motivated the recent creation of a dedicated department for drones at the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA).

The regulatory body also has a motivation to drive investments in helicopter business.

The resourcefulness of helicopters helped the procurement of 12 attack helicopters for the Nigerian army by president Bola Tinubu in 2023.

Helicopters have also been useful to companies like Flying Doctors Nigeria, which has for years, provided emergency and medical services.

Some of the helicopter companies that presently operate in Nigeria include Odegene Air Services Limited (OAS), Caverton Helicopters, Bristow Helicopters, Alpha Helicopter Limited (AHL) and Aero Helicopters. ▲

# ABSOLUTE AIMS TO BE FABULOUS IN NAMIBIA

*Absolute Aviation (Switzerland) has recently acquired Aviation Centre, an aircraft maintenance facility located in Windhoek, Namibia. This "strategic move" will strengthen its footprint and competitive edge in Africa.*

**Anuradha Deenapanray Chappard reports.**

**A**bsolute Aviation is the authorised sales, service, and parts representative for Cessna (the oldest service facility outside the USA since 1964), Beechcraft, and Pipistrel in Southern and Central Africa.

Absolute Service Centre includes Hawker 700, 800A/XP and 900XP, Premier 390 and Beechjet 400 series aircraft models.

The company also represents aircraft parts, engines, and performance enhancement manufacturers in Africa, alongside aviation services relating to aircraft and flight operations management through fixed based operations and flight services business.

According to Absolute Aviation, "this acquisition will reinforce its position in the Southern African aviation industry and bolster its aircraft maintenance organisation (AMO) and aircraft parts services".

It also represents a strategic enhancement of Absolute Aviation's capabilities in delivering



IMAGE: ABSOLUTE AVIATION

"comprehensive solutions to its esteemed clientele".

Rebranded into Absolute Aviation Centre, the maintenance plant will operate under the umbrella of Absolute Aviation. Neil Howard, CEO of Absolute Aviation underlined the "company's unwavering dedication to upholding the highest standards of professionalism, quality, and customer satisfaction as it integrates Aviation Centre into its operations".

He added that the company will remain

steadfast in its commitment to collaboration, innovation, and excellence, and looked forward to achieving even greater milestones together with its expanded team.

Peter Hartmann, the founder of Aviation Centre, will manoeuvre the transition phase and sustained growth within the Absolute Aviation family.

Absolute Aviation plans to leverage the newly-acquired facility as a strategic parts warehouse. By ensuring swift and reliable access to a wide array of aircraft parts, the company aims to enhance efficiency and better cater to the diverse needs of its customers across the region.

Africa's fastest-growing general aviation company has its African operations in Lanseria International Airport with a number of aviation businesses out of five hangars.

It also has satellite locations in African airports – South Africa (Cape Town and Wonderboom) and Maun in Botswana. ▲

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Lt General Wiseman Mbambo: "With a lack of strategic air lift capability, our people around the world are sitting ducks."  
IMAGE: SAAF



# SAAF SOLDIERING ON

The South African Air Force (SAAF) has been subject to increasingly heavy budget cuts. It is therefore having to do a lot with a little, particularly in terms of its responsibilities to its broader African peacekeeping responsibilities. **Guy Leitch** takes a closer look.

**C**hief of the South African Air Force Lt General Wiseman Mbambo discussed the challenges the SAAF is facing in meeting its responsibilities with extremely limited resources. He said: "The SAAF is in the midst of a storm, with the world punctuated by conflicts and instability. The eagerness to move towards the negotiating table is no longer there, with international bodies proving weak in resolving conflicts and a growing appetite to resolve conflicts through the barrel of a gun. The Israel/Palestine and Ukraine conflicts are stark examples."

South African defence minister, Thandi Modise, has stated that approximately 85 per cent of the SAAF's aircraft are currently "out of action", with most airframes awaiting servicing, spare parts and/or repairs. For Mbambo, this means

that his primary concern revolves around the SAAF's ability to fulfil its obligations effectively. These obligations include participating in peacekeeping operations, safeguarding national borders and combating illegal activities.

Mbambo stressed that the significant responsibilities of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) extended beyond traditional military roles. He highlighted their involvement in societal duties like responding to natural disasters and fires.

Mbambo said that defence funding should not be at the bottom of the priority list. He explained the SAAF is working diligently with what it has and is "sweating assets".

"Closer to home, the embers of Cabo Delgado and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo have not died down

yet, and are flaring up, while humanitarian disasters are increasing, including wildfires and floods, meaning SAAF assets are in high demand. With a lack of strategic air lift capability, our people around the world are sitting ducks," he said.

In terms of its African peacekeeping responsibilities, SAAF assets are currently committed to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mozambique. In May 2024 there was a large airlift of SAAF assets from Upington, significantly using chartered Ilyushin Il-76 transports instead of the SAAF's few remaining airworthy Lockheed Martin C-130s, to support the Southern African Development Community (SADC) mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC).

Reporting on the SAAF command council strategic work session, Mbambo

Continued  
on Page 41 

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

said: “The SANDF plays a pivotal role in maintaining the nation’s security and assisting in various domestic and international situations and a lack of adequate funding poses significant challenges.”

Mbambo has emphasised the far-reaching consequences and risks of insufficient financial support for the air force, and the SANDF as a whole.

Drawing a parallel between a household budget and the defence force’s financial situation, Mbambo pointed out that when funds are scarce, difficult decisions must be made to manage within those constraints and unpopular choices become a necessity. Just as a household must cut back on expenses during tough times, the SAAF is implementing cost-saving measures and striving to stay within its budget. However, aviation safety must not be compromised during this process,” he said.

The findings of a recent SAAF strategic work session identified key under-resourcing problem areas as: unavailability of aircraft, lack of spares, procurement issues, shortage of uniforms, and more. Noteworthy too is that unserviceable air conditioning at the SAAF headquarters “has rendered the building uninhabitable”.

Mbambo said: “If we can resolve all these issues, starting with command and control, we will be able to hold each other and ourselves accountable.”

He emphasised the importance of investing in in-house capabilities, investing in personnel training and fostering a culture of innovation and seeking efficiencies to ensure essential tasks are managed effectively within constrained budgets. This approach allows the SAAF to make the most of limited resources and maintain its readiness.

□□□□□

In a recent *Defenceweb* interview, Mbambo acknowledged the difficulties and complexities of the current situation, but emphasised the commitment to maintaining the readiness and serviceability of the SAAF.

He also highlighted the need for other relevant supporting departments, like Armscor, to fulfil their mandates, particularly in successfully placing essential contracts for the benefit of the defence force.

Aside from its funding constraints, the SAAF came under criticism for lowering its fitness standards for commissioned officers. More than half of the candidates for the SAAF’s officers’ forming course

Just as a household must cut back on expenses during tough times, the SAAF is implementing cost-saving measures and striving to stay within its budget.

LT GENERAL WISEMAN MBAMBO

(OFC) failed to pass the fitness test that formed part of the entrance requirements.

Controversially, Mbambo initially ordered that the course proceed as planned. “The SAAF should consider affording these aspirant officers an opportunity to be officers’-course qualified. It would be in the best interest of both the organisation and indeed its members, particularly those who passed the fitness test, to be allowed to proceed with the OFC. A once-off waiver should be granted to the nine learners who failed the fitness test,” he said.

In his directive, Mbambo stated that those who failed the fitness test should “gradually and progressively” prepare themselves to pass the fitness test two months into the OFC. However, this qualified approval was later rescinded and the course was cancelled.

Commenting about the “total wellness” of the SAAF, Mbambo said: “The South African Air Force vision of projecting effective air and space power through innovation in the theatre of our operations will remain a pipe-dream unless we address the matter of total wellness of our people.

“Unless our people are totally well in all these areas, they cannot perform to their maximum capacity. At the moment, the members of the air force are incapable of delivering to their full potential due to these hindrances,” he said.

The SAAF has also been active in developing the South African Space Command (SASCS) which is expected to manage and coordinate all defence-related space activities, collaborating with the South African National Space Agency (SANSa) and other government agencies.

Mbambo says that establishing SASCS represents a notable advancement for South Africa, reflecting the country’s renewed focus on space exploration and technology. Similarly, this development holds great potential for defence and beneficial impacts across multiple sectors, such as telecommunications, agriculture, and environmental monitoring.

To facilitate the smooth implementation of South Africa’s national space strategy, the space command integrated planning team (SCRIPT) was formed to lead the establishment of a

dedicated SASCS within the South African Air Force (SAAF). Mbambo noted that SCRIPT consists of “highly skilled military practitioners and has achieved significant advancements within a short period since its establishment in 2022”.

He noted that the SCRIPT team has collaborated with public and private entities at both local and international levels.

“This collaboration has fostered a unified effort in implementing the national space strategy. It has nearly completed the groundwork, including mapping local capabilities and incorporating future planning mechanisms from industry experts and the federal government,” he said.

□□□□□

Furthermore, SCRIPT has undertaken several international engagements to ensure the SAAF aligns with the best global practices. This includes a partnership with the Italian Air Force to gain insights and experiences from implementing the Italian Defence Force space operations command.

In addition, arrangements with other allied nations are under way, cementing South Africa’s commitment to embracing international standards and knowledge.

“By leveraging these collaborations, the SAAF is positioning itself at the forefront of space capabilities, actively contributing to national development,” Mbambo explained.

Both Mbambo and general Rudzani Maphwanya, the chief of the national defence force, have publicly remarked on the challenges of harsh budget constraints. Mbambo expressed the hope that ongoing discussions and appeals to government bodies, led by the minister of defence, will prompt a positive response in terms of increased funding for the defence sector.

“The price tag to maintain SAAF assets is very high,” Mbambo concluded, with the reality being a lack of adequate funding for defence.

“Parliament’s comments on defence and the ministers of defence have presented the funding case, and we are optimistic this storm will pass away.” ▲

## ZAMBIA UPGRADES WITH ENSTROMS

The Zambian Air Force (ZAF) has commissioned two new Enstrom 480B turbine helicopters into service as it forges ahead with an upgrade of aviation assets as part of an ongoing force modernisation programme.

The helicopters were acquired in a deal signed between US aircraft manufacturer Enstrom Helicopter Corporation (EHC) and the ZAF early in 2023. EHC has already trained some ZAF helicopter pilots and maintenance technicians to provide life extension servicing for the aircraft.

ZAF commander lieutenant-general Oscar Nyoni said the helicopters will be deployed to carry out multiple tasks beyond routine training and utility missions.

“These helicopters will serve a multitude of crucial tasks like the training of pilots, deployment in search and rescue, medical evacuation, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) anti-poaching and anti-smuggling operations,” Nyoni said.

Enstrom chief executive officer Dennis Martin said the company is proud to be partnering with Zambia through the provision of multi-mission helicopters: “Beyond just typical uses like pilot training and utility flight missions, these versatile helicopters will be used for



**Enstrom 480B: the helicopters will serve a multitude of crucial tasks.**

IMAGE: NAEBI DYNAMIC CONCEPTS LIMITED

missions like anti-poaching and public safety (operations). They are going to be productive assets for the Zambian people,” he said.

Powered by a Rolls-Royce 250-C20W turbo-shaft engine, the Enstrom 480B light utility helicopter has a maximum cruise speed of 211 km/h and a flight range of 700km while carrying loads of up to 1,292kg.

The acquisition of the two Enstrom 480B choppers followed shortly after the Zambian Air Force received two used Bell 412 helicopters under a US\$80 million grant provided by the US Department of Defense for the acquisition of up to four utility helicopters.

The ZAF already operates some Augusta-Bell 412, Bell 205 and Bell 206 variants. Apart from US-made helicopters, the ZAF also operates a mix of Russian-made helicopter models such as the Mil Mi-8, Mil Mi 17 and the Chinese-made Harbin Z-9, which is derived from the French-made Eurocopter AS-365 Dauphin which is built under licence in China.

The increase in the tempo of acquisitions from US manufacturers and through US funding marks a departure from decades-old Zambian dependence on Chinese defence equipment manufacturers to supply national security equipment needs. ▲

## SKYLEADER HERALDS TANZANIA’S AVIATION BREAKTHROUGH

Tanzania has made significant strides in the aeronautical field over the past years. Its first homemade aircraft designed specifically for business travel, the Skyleader 600, was unveiled at the Tanzania International Manufacturers Expo 2023 (TIMEXPO) hosted in Dar es Salaam.

Built at the Morogoro regional airport factory by Airplanes Africa Limited (AAL), this all-metal two-seat ultralight aircraft has either a tricycle towed fixed landing gear and a steerable nose wheel, or a retractable gear.

□□□□□

The aircraft can be used for recreational flying, pilot training and special operations.

The Morogoro plant assembled Tanzania’s first aircraft back in October 2023.

Located around 190 km west of the capital, it plays a pivotal role in aircraft assembly, by capitalising on the company’s branches in the Czech Republic, China, Germany and Russia.

The director of the Morogoro plant, Eng Igor Stratl, underlines that Tanzania’s “reputation for security, stability and peace” were key factors for the company’s implementation and expansion.



AAL is the first company in Tanzania to manufacture an aircraft with both commercial and personal applications.

It benefits from the country’s conducive investment environment and people’s willingness to embrace new technologies. The company employs many graduates of the National Institute of Transport (NIT).

**The Skyleader 600: It can be used for recreational flying, pilot training and special operations.**

IMAGE: WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

According to Mussa Mbura, director general of the Tanzania Airport Authority (TAA), “the investment by AAL not only generates revenue opportunities for the government but also fosters job creation for Tanzanian citizens”. He says that additional aircraft assembly is “imminent.”

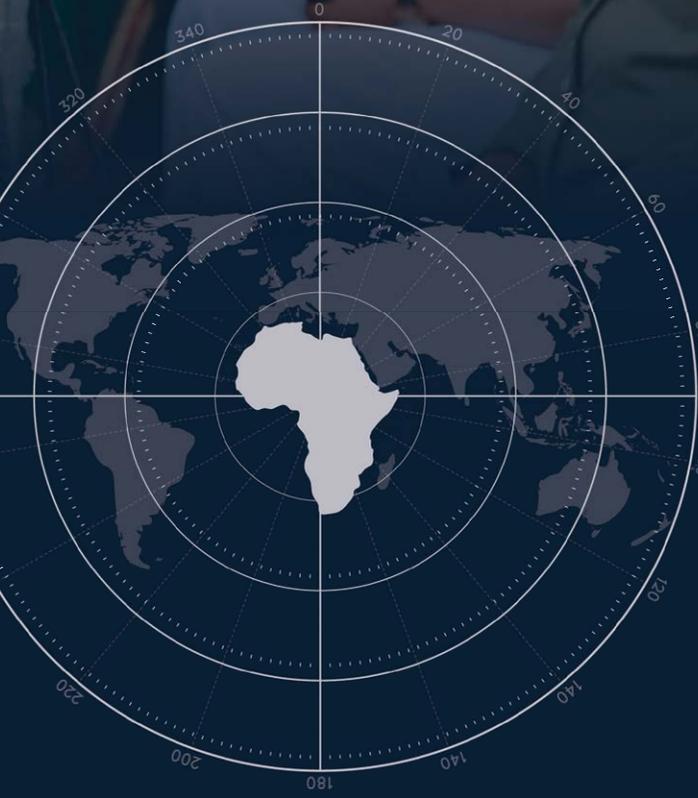
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AAL plans to launch the Skyleader 500, an economic aircraft designed for agricultural activities in rural areas.

The company’s ambition is to market its aircraft beyond Tanzania. There are interesting opportunities in the region.

This historic milestone has no doubt hooked Tanzania on board the booming aerospace industry in Africa, especially with South Africa (since the 1920s) and in the north, notably with Morocco (since the 1950s).

Government-private partnerships, investments in fleet renewal and expansion, in cargo facilities, and in research and training through the Tanzania Civil Aviation Authority (TCAA), are keeping the local aerospace sector on an upward trajectory. ▲



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A round-up of all the latest defence stories in Africa. Compiled by Jon Lake.

# Blow to Western security ops as Chad evicts US forces

The latest blow to Western counter insurgency operations in the Sahel came with Chad asking the US to withdraw its forces. Following a coup in neighbouring Niger, French and then US forces had already been asked to leave that country and, following a rapprochement with Russia, Russian mercenary group Wagner (operating as the Africa Corps) moved in.

This has already dealt a serious blow to Western military operations in the Sahel, against groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group. The US was forced to vacate Niger Air Base 201 near Agadez, into which the US had invested millions of dollars, and which was critical to US counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel.

The Chadian army questioned whether an existing agreement covered the transfer of US troops from neighbouring Niger, and has demanded a cessation of US activities at the Adji Kosseï air base, a military enclave of N'Djamena airport.



US AFRICOM will now reposition some 100 US military special forces personnel currently stationed in Chad to the Stuttgart-Möhringen base in Germany where Africom has its headquarters. This may or may not be a temporary situation, and there have been reports that the US hoped to review its security co-operation and negotiate a new agreement after Chad's May 6 presidential election.

There is a real fear that Chad may now fall within Russia's orbit, joining Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso (all of which have recently ejected French forces as part of a realignment with Russia) and potentially creating a land corridor between the Central African Republic and Sudan, and Putin's new allies in the Sahel, creating a 'belt' of Russian influence across the continent, and seriously undermining the West's efforts to stamp out Islamist insurgency and terrorism in the Sahel.

Fortunately, the US and its allies have a firm ally in Nigeria, where anti-terrorist



operations are taken very seriously indeed, and where the armed forces have been undertaking a major re-equipment programme.

■ With the induction of Sino-Pakistani JF-17s, Embraer/SNC A-29 Super Tucanos and no fewer than three types of attack helicopter (the TAI T129, Bell's AH-1Z and MD Helicopters MD530F Cayuse Warriors), Nigeria is now expected to receive the first 24 Leonardo M-346FA advanced jet trainer/light attack aircraft later this year.

The aircraft are expected to arrive in Nigeria in four batches of six aircraft, with the first batch due to be delivered in late 2024. The contract includes 25 years of logistical support by Leonardo.

The new aircraft will be used for advanced training, but also for COIN duties, augmenting and eventually replacing the air force's existing L-39s and Alpha Jets. These have seen extensive service against Boko Haram and Islamic State militants in the north and northeast, along the borders with Niger and Chad. The M-346FA will bring improved capabilities, with a helmet-mounted sighting system, new-generation equipment and sensors (including a Grifo-M-346 mechanical-scanned radar), a tactical datalink and a suite of advanced

**Coming soon:  
Nigeria is expected  
to receive the first  
24 Leonardo  
M-346FA advanced jet  
trainer/light attack  
aircraft  
later this year.**  
IMAGE: LEONARDO

precision-guided weapons. In many respects the aircraft represent a more capable platform than the ageing Chengdu F-7NI fighters that currently form the backbone of the Nigerian Air Force's combat air capability, with a more capable radar and Western air-to-air missiles for the air defence role, and with better air-to-ground weapons and greater low-level manoeuvrability.



The Nigerian armed forces are also procuring four CN235-220 transport aircraft via African aviation firm Allied Aeronautics. Some reports suggest that these are being procured for the Army, rather than the Air Force, though this would seem improbable. Aircraft manufacturer PT Dirgantara Indonesia (PTDI) announced the deal in a recent press release.

"This new contract for Nigeria is also one of our strategic steps to penetrate the markets of South Asian and African countries," PTDI said. The contract follows 2022 talks on potential military hardware sales and joint production to the West African country.

PTDI developed the CASA/IPTN CN-235 variant with technology transfer from CASA Spain in the 1980s. PTDI has since sold 70 CN235-220s including five to



Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, while Airbus Military is concentrating on production of the stretched and modernised C295.

The aircraft can operate from short, unpaved and grassy runways, and features a glass cockpit, modern avionics, autopilot, and has winglets for better stability and fuel economy. The new aircraft will augment Nigeria's existing Lockheed C-130H and C-130H-30 Hercules, replacing the air force's six now-stored Aeritalia G222s, and restoring the transport fleet to its former size. The aircraft will allow better support to the Nigerian Army's operations in more remote areas of the country.

#### African Air Chiefs Symposium

■ The 13th African Air Chiefs Symposium was hosted by the Tunisian Air Force and US Air Forces Africa in Tunis, from February 26 to March 1. The symposium was organised and orchestrated by the Association of African Air Forces (AAAF), a voluntary, non-political organisation including 29 African member nations and the US, and focused on collaborative, multilateral engagements to promote African-led air-power solutions, and facilitating shared training and education opportunities to address challenges faced by African air forces.

General David W. Allvin, the US Air

Force chief of staff, used the event to thank local air chiefs for their commitment to the future of African airpower. "Your presence here matters to Africa's future. The United States is committed to African-born, African-led, U.S.-enabled air power, and I'm very excited about the direction that we are headed together," he said.



Gen. James B. Hecker, commander of US Air Forces in Europe - Air Forces Africa (USAFE-AF Africa) and AAAF co-chairman, said that the symposium allowed air chiefs to discuss timely, pressing issues. "The African Air Chiefs Symposium provides air chiefs on the continent an opportunity to come together and develop authentic, meaningful relationships," he said. "During the symposium, air chiefs learn each other's first names, they learn their cultures, their problems and how their air forces deal with challenges."

Tunisian Air Force chief of staff Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hajem, chairman of the Association of African Air Forces, outlined his priorities, and underlined the theme of 'Pan-African education and training opportunities'. He noted that: "We can strive to reach common ground and innovate all of our air forces. We can

**Chad ally: There is a real fear that Chad may now fall within Russia's orbit.**

IMAGE: US AIR FORCE

assist one another by working together to advance air cooperation in Africa. Education is the strongest weapon to inspire change, which is the heart of our African Air Chiefs' Symposium."

Conversations during previous symposia led to the concept of 'operationalisation' of the association, and members passed a proposed operationalisation road map.

This is intended to be the mechanism via which AAAF will implement its short- and long-term goals, via a three-year exercise cycle, with a tabletop exercise in 2025 to solidify strategies, followed by a field training exercise in 2026. These exercises will primarily revolve around discussing and simulating responses to a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief scenario.

One of the key proposals successfully passed this year was to integrate WPS (women, peace and security) initiatives into the association. These WPS initiatives are based on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which highlighted the importance of women's full and equal participation in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction.

General Birame Diop,  
United Nations Department  
of Peace Operations military

Continued  
on Page 47

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In Association with



## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

adviser, observed that: "Participating in the promotion of gender mainstreaming and the implementation of WPS requires particular skills, and skills do not appear out of nowhere. Skills are developed with training and education."

France has reportedly finally approved the transfer of some 30 Dassault Mirage 2000-9 fighters from the UAE to Morocco. This required the approval of the manufacturer and of the French government.

The approval was made on Wednesday April 10, following discussions between the Moroccan and French foreign ministers. The UAE had to overcome what was described as "vehement French opposition" before the transfer was eventually approved, some three years after it was initially requested.

The Mirage 2000-9 is the most advanced Mirage 2000 variant, and was specifically developed for the UAE.

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The United Arab Emirates originally placed an order for 36 Mirage 2000SAD-8 aircraft in May 1983, comprising 22 single-seat Mirage 2000AED, eight single-seat Mirage 2000RAD reconnaissance variants, and six Mirage 2000DAD trainers, all broadly equivalent to the Mirage 2000-5, but with a new Italian-made defensive avionics suite that delayed delivery of the first aircraft until 1989.

In November 1998, the UAE signed a \$3.2 billion contract for 32 Mirage 2000-9s (20 single-seat Mirage 2000-9s and 12 two-seat 2000-9Ds), with a parallel upgrade to the 30 of the 33 then-surviving SAD-8 aircraft to bring them up to the new standard. The first aircraft was delivered in 2003. There are assumed to have been some additional deliveries, since the UAE is now credited with having more aircraft than were delivered!

The Mirage 2000s were rendered surplus by Abu Dhabi's forthcoming acquisition of up to 80 Dassault Rafales. The UAE reportedly has 69 surviving Mirage 2000-9 aircraft, and wanted to transfer 30 of these to Morocco and 39 to Egypt, an existing Mirage 2000 operator.

France reportedly wanted to buy back 40 of the Emirati Mirage 2000-9s in order to transfer them to Ukraine. The extensive programme transferring former Benelux and Scandinavian F-16s to Ukraine made this less of a priority.

Morocco has been working to strengthen its air defence capabilities, and the Mirage 2000-9s will augment 25 new Lockheed Martin F-16 Block 72s, 23 surviving F-16Cs upgraded to F-16V standards, and about a



**France has reportedly finally approved the transfer of some 30 Dassault Mirage 2000-9 fighters from the UAE to Morocco.**

IMAGE: US AIR FORCE

squadron of upgraded Mirage F1s if these are not simply retired.

Morocco has also built up a formidable fleet of UAVs, giving it the second-largest inventory of unmanned aerial systems in Africa, behind Egypt.

Keen not to be left behind, neighbour and regional rival Algeria has made efforts to recapitalise its own UAV fleet, and recently acquired four WJ-700 Falcon unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp (CASIC). Algeria is already an operator of Chinese-supplied CH-4 and CH-3 drones, and has ordered six Turkish Aksungur UAVs, and 10 Anka-S UAVs for ISR (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance) and attack missions.

The Algerian government placed an order for the four WJ-700 Falcon HALE (high-altitude long endurance) UCAVs during the first quarter of 2022, and they were delivered in March 2024. They have entered service following extensive acceptance trials.

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The WJ-700 attack is a large, turbojet-powered unmanned combat aerial vehicle. It was originally developed by Beijing Haiying General Aviation Equipment (a division of CASIC) and made its first flight as recently as January 11, 2021. It is capable of performing both reconnaissance and attack missions and has an 800-kg payload, as well as the ability to employ stand off weapons with ranges of up to 100 km, including C-705KD anti-ship missiles, C-701 air-to-surface missiles, and SM-102 anti-radar missiles.

The PLA information department has claimed that sales of Chinese military UAVs will account for about 25 per cent of the global market, or 17 billion yuan (\$2.6 billion) in 2024.

With a fighter fleet that has already been recapitalised via the induction of some 72 Sukhoi Su-30MKa multi-role fighters, and 14 new-generation MiG-

29M/M2s, and with 14 Su-57s and Su-34s and/or Su-35s on order, the Algerian air force is proposing to supply some of its older excess MiG-29 'Fulcrum-A' fighters to the Sudanese Air Force.

Algeria purchased a large number of Mikoyan MiG-29s from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine between 1999 and 2003, and received the first of a planned MiG-29SMT fighters from 2006, intending to make the type the backbone of its frontline fighter force. Expecting new build aircraft, Algeria found that the SMTs were refurbished second-hand aircraft, and they were returned to Russia amid some acrimony.

Plans to upgrade older MiG-29s were abandoned, and attention switched to the Su-30. About 36 first generation MiG-29s remain in service, and it is understood that many of these will be transferred to Sudan, which already has about a dozen older MiG-29s in service. Where this will leave the 'orphan fleet' of 14 MiG-29M/M2s remains unclear.

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Russia supplies about two thirds of Algeria's weapons and Algeria is today one of Russia's most important customers. Algeria is set to become the first export operator of the much-hyped Su-57, prompting something of an arms race in North Africa. Morocco is expanding its Air Force in response, and the Su-57 procurement has already triggered a Moroccan request to acquire the F-35.

Strengthening relations between Angola and China are likely to see further oil-backed loans to access Chinese funding for infrastructure, though both sides are turning their attention beyond oil to mining, agriculture and manufacturing.

During recent bilateral talks in Beijing between Angolan president Joao Lourenco and Chinese president Xi Jinping, it emerged that Angola was seeking financing to build a refinery at Lobito, a petrochemical plant and a military air force base.

China has financed port projects along the African coast, and a new airfield could facilitate closer military cooperation, and could enhance Beijing's intelligence gathering opportunities, though it would not necessarily be a Chinese military facility.

Despite this, access to an air base built to Chinese specifications on familiar terrain would potentially provide a useful logistical support base for any regional operations, and access (depending how it were negotiated) could allow limited PLA Air Force operations by manned or unmanned aircraft. ▲

IMAGES: CAPE WINELANDS AIRPORT



# THE GRAPE ESCAPE

*Cape Winelands Airport is poised to play a pivotal role in South Africa’s aviation landscape.*

**Chloë Greenbank** takes a closer look.

**P**reviously known as Fisantekraal, Cape Winelands Airport is about to undergo a substantial transformation aimed at establishing it as a significant aviation hub in South Africa.

Located on the outskirts of Durbanville, the airport’s redevelopment will position it as a crucial alternative to Cape Town International Airport, approximately 45km away.

Having first opened in 1943, Cape Winelands has long been popular for light aircraft and private aviation, particularly training flights. In 2020, the airport was acquired by rsa.AERO, led by Nicholas Ferguson, the executive director of Cape Winelands Aero and executive managing director at rsa.AERO. With his background in accounting and property development, Ferguson immediately recognised the value and untapped potential of the airport, which features four runways, two of which are currently operational.



“We acquired the airport with plans to develop it and as we started unravelling the opportunities, its potential as an alternate airport to Cape Town became clear,” he explained to *African Aerospace*.

Currently, wide-body aircraft have to designate Johannesburg O.R. Tambo, which is 1,270km away, as an alternative airport in the



event they can’t land at Cape Town. “This requires airlines to carry extra fuel, increasing carbon emissions and reducing payload capacity. By providing a closer alternate option, airlines can save substantial fuel costs and reduce their emissions,” stated Ferguson.

A study by Netherlands Airport Consultants (NACO) supports Cape Winelands’ vision. It indicates that while Cape Town currently handles 10 million passengers annually, this number is expected to double by 2050 to at least 20 million, with five million of these passengers accommodated by Cape Winelands Airport.

The airport’s expansion plans over the next three years include developing a 4F runway with

a length of 3.5 km, capable of accommodating large aircraft, including the Airbus A380. Phase one, costing an estimated \$300-\$400 million will also feature a new parallel taxiway, apron and a 25,000 sqm terminal. This phase is expected to be completed by 2027.

Ferguson revealed: “The environmental assessment is due to be finalised early next year, with construction set to begin in Q1 2025 and a two-year build process anticipated.

“Additionally, plans include developing sites for FBOs, hotels, cargo facilities and other infrastructure in line with demand to ensure sustainable growth.”

The airport also has plans to be the “greenest”



in the world, an “audacious, but achievable goal”, said Ferguson, that involves operating off-grid for electricity and water. The airport plans to install a solar array and has applied for a 1MW biodigester to generate electricity using grasses grown on site as a feedstock. Any excess power will be sold back to the grid, creating an alternative revenue stream.

“Landside, we’re also looking to develop a big public plaza, hotels, a museum and a wine experience centre where we can showcase the wines of the region, as well as parking and outdoor advertising to generate additional revenue.”



The airport is also embracing aviation’s digital transformation and is consulting with Saab and NACO to implement Africa’s first digital tower.

“It’s a huge project we’re undertaking, but one we’re committed to and which will stimulate economic growth in the region,” said Ferguson. He referenced the airport’s board featuring a stellar line-up of aviation experts as being key to that vision. It includes two former Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA) CEOs, the general manager of Cape Town International Airport, the former chief of the South African Air Force and the chairman on the board of Safair Operations.

Highlighting the airport’s broader vision, Ferguson concluded: “It used to be that the holiday started at the airport, not at the destination. We’ve lost that love of travel. We want to bring that back by building an airport that is welcoming, offers an experience and reflects a sense of place, integrating into the surrounding environment and showcasing Cape Town as a world-class tourism destination.” ▲

**Guy Leitch** chats to **Nozipho Mdawe**, the CEO of South African Air Traffic Navigation Services (ATNS).

## HOW MDAWE IS NAVIGATING ATNS THROUGH ITS CHALLENGES

ATNS provides air traffic management (ATM) services to all nine ACSA airports, as well as 12 regional airports. The company also has a presence in 24 other African countries, plus St Helena Island, and is responsible for a large part of the Southern Indian and Atlantic Ocean, comprising approximately six per cent of the world’s airspace.

As a state-owned enterprise, human resource development is a key component of the company’s development mandate.

The company has therefore developed the ATNS Aviation Training Academy (ATA), which in partnership with the South African National Space Agency (SANSA), has launched an aviation programme to understand and mitigate the effects of solar activity on aviation.

This programme is aligned with ICAO initiatives to appropriately respond to adverse space weather conditions, such as occurred in mid-May 2024. “The aviation space is increasingly becoming prone to the effects of space weather due to the greater use and continued miniaturisation of microelectronics. This is in addition to the growing reliance on signals from satellite-based aviation navigation systems.

Awareness and preparation for eventualities like solar storms and mass coronal ejections has become critical in our industry,” said Mdawe.

“We are also very proud that ATNS’s Aviation Training Academy has been voted IATA’s best training academy for three consecutive years,” Mdawe noted.

ATNS provides more than just a pure air traffic management function in South Africa. The company has been awarded a contract for ILS maintenance for South African national airports.

Mdawe said, “We have a 30-year service excellence record of maintaining ILS systems for and upholding safety standards and regulations as prescribed by the SACAA and ICAO that gives us a competitive edge in the aviation market. Safety is a priority and a lived corporate value at ATNS. This has earned us recognition as a preferred supplier of air traffic management solutions throughout the African continent.”

In conjunction with the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), ATNS is leading the way in

technology adoption, particular in the field of passive radar. ATNS and CSIR engineering teams are working at Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport (KMIA) to survey passive radar site coverage. “The CSIR developed the technology, while ATNS provides the technical know-how on the system configuration, in line with the International Civil Aviation Organization standards and recommended practices (ICAO SARPs). The aim is to determine the coverage that the system will provide in the area once deployed. This exercise will also determine the sites and the number of radar antennas to be installed,” she said.

“Deploying passive radar at KMIA is an ideal opportunity to test the system, refine the current software and hardware solutions, and monitor continued passive radar performance characterisation testing over a predetermined period,” Mdawe said.

As a state-owned enterprise, ATNS has been recognised for the transformation of its employee racial mix. “We are on the right track to meet the national development plan objectives as an aviation industry player,” Mdawe added.

However, one of the more significant challenges ATNS faces is staff retention, with many of its experienced air traffic controllers being lured to other countries. ATNS has acknowledged that there is a 10 per cent shortage of ATCs, particularly at

Johannesburg International Airport, with staff losses of approximately 10 per cent per year.

To address this, ATNS has signed a joint strategy agreement with the South African Air Force (SAAF) to work together in the deployment of infrastructure, training, human resource sharing, and airspace management.

“The joint strategy aims to establish a collaborative arrangement between ATNS and the SAAF for the deployment of SAAF ATC officers at various ATNS ATSUs (air traffic services units).

“This arrangement aims to address staffing constraints currently faced by ATNS while simultaneously providing valuable traffic exposure and experience to SAAF ATC personnel,” Mdawe said. ▲



Nozipho Mdawe: “We are on the right track to meet the national development plan objectives.”

IMAGE: ATNS

*Menzies is leveraging the potential for growth in Africa's ground-handling market.*  
**Chloë Greenbank** reports.



**Ground force: Menzies has operations at 40 airports in 19 countries across the continent.**

IMAGE: MENZIES

# Open skies could open new doors for Menzies

As passenger traffic across Africa continues to increase, the aviation sector is poised for significant expansion. According to Airports Council International (ACI) World, passenger traffic on the continent is projected to reach 242 million passengers in 2024 (surpassing 2019 levels by six per cent) and 261 million passengers in 2025.

This sustained growth heralds substantial opportunities for all aviation industry stakeholders and ground handlers are no exception.

One company tapping into this potential for growth is Menzies Aviation. In 2022, it joined forces with National Aviation Services (NAS) to create the largest aviation services company in Africa. It currently has operations at 40 airports in 19 countries across the continent and is well positioned to accelerate growth.



“We know the potential for air travel in Africa is huge. It has 17 per cent of the world’s population yet only contributes about two per cent of total global travel,” Abdoulaye Cisse, Menzies Aviation’s head of Africa told *African Aerospace*.

“To capitalise on these opportunities there is broad recognition of the need to open African air transport through deregulation and enable consumers in the African region to take advantage of the opportunities that aviation provides.”

With the pandemic now in the past and Menzies well positioned to strengthen its position, Cisse noted the business is still impacted by various challenges. He cited, “the protectionism of national carriers, limited visa-free



**Abdoulaye Cisse: “There is broad recognition of the need to open African air transport through deregulation and enable consumers in the African region to take advantage of the opportunities that aviation provides.”**

IMAGE: MENZIES

travel, a lack of investment in airport infrastructure, political instability and high taxes forcing up fees,” as hurdles that need to be overcome.

The skilled workforce shortage is another factor that needs to be addressed. “Attracting a new generation of people to our industry is also key, not only in Africa but around the world,” he said.

Despite these challenges, Menzies remains committed to working with local governments, customers and partners to support the aviation industry and the region’s economic growth. “Increasing our footprint is a priority for us and with operations in 19 out of the 54 countries in Africa, there are plenty of opportunities available.”

Cisse also highlighted that while air cargo operations saw a spike during the pandemic with products in the medical, perishables and e-commerce sectors filling the space, cargo tonne kilometres in Africa are currently down by 2.8 per cent compared with pre-pandemic levels.

E-commerce does however remain a driver of growth for ground handling with Cisse emphasising the huge potential it has to transform the cargo landscape.

“E-commerce has really started to take off across some markets in Africa and although we are not seeing this translate into air cargo volumes on the continent just yet, it does hold significant potential,” he explained.



To enhance efficiency and safety across its operations, Menzies is embracing innovations in technology and automated services. “Across our business, we are embracing the power of digital processes to create efficiencies and ultimately deliver a better service for customers. We’re modernising our facilities and processes with a focus on automation and digitalisation,” he said, referencing the roll out of Menzies new MACH (Menzies aviation cargo handling) management system.

“MACH represents a significant enhancement on our current cargo management system, boasting a modern user interface (UI) with easy-to-use navigation, making it exceptionally user friendly for all stakeholders. Its cloud-based architecture ensures accessibility from anywhere, anytime and on any device, providing real-time insights and data,” he said.

Further underpinning Menzies’ investment in Africa’s ground-handling sector, was its decision last year to join IATA’s Focus Africa initiative. “Joining the initiative is testament to our long-term commitment to the continent and our desire to collaborate with industry leaders to improve aviation safety, facilitate growth and contribute to Africa’s development journey,” he explained.

Concluding that Menzies is optimistic about the outlook for the market in Africa both in the short and long term, Cisse added: “As the first ground-services company to partner on this initiative, we are determined to use our position and expertise to raise the bar for aviation services across Africa, providing new technologies, equipment, training and certifications.”



Nakedi Phasha: "We aim to foster a vibrant environment for knowledge exchange, networking, and partnership development."  
IMAGE: AAD

## It all AADs up to an expo double

*Two of Africa's top aviation, aerospace and defence events are set to take place close to Johannesburg in September.*

**Guy Leitch and Alan Peaford** look at what's in store.

**E**verything that is good about the aerospace, aviation and defence industry can be discovered in just one week in September as the Africa Aerospace and Defence show (AAD) and the Aviation Africa Summit and Exhibition take place in Tishwane and Sandton respectively.

The Aviation Africa Summit brings regulators, airline leaders, MRO, major associations such as AFRAA, AFCAC and AfBAA, banks, and aviation services together under the one roof at the Sandton Convention Centre September 16-17, with AAD taking place at the Waterkoof Air Base from 18-22.

Being a biennial expo, the AAD show was hard hit by the Covid pandemic. AAD's marketing and communications manager Nakedi Phasha said that the recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic has varied across sectors and regions, with the aerospace and defence industry being no exception. "However, recognising the importance of AAD 2024 as a catalyst for growth and collaboration, our primary objective is to reverse this trend and make the upcoming expo the biggest and best yet," Phasha said.

There is a large presence expected from across Africa. "By actively engaging with stakeholders across the continent and implementing targeted strategies to attract attendees, we aim to foster a vibrant environment for knowledge exchange, networking, and partnership development," she said.

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Among the major OEMs attending are Airbus, Embraer, Leonardo and Russian Helicopters.

"We have a significant increase in general aviation support compared with previous years," Phasha said. "We have introduced several new hubs designed to showcase the latest innovations."

For two days ahead of the AAD show the Aviation Africa summit will be in full swing. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the South Africa Civil Aviation Association (SACAA) the award-winning event comes to South Africa for the first time.

"We are expecting record turnouts for this show," said Mark Brown, managing director of Times Aerospace Events, the event organiser.

"We are working closely with SACAA and other organisations like the AFCAC, African Union's specialised agency for all civil aviation matters; African Business Aviation Association (AfBAA); the African Airlines Association, (AFRAA); the Airlines Association of Southern Africa (AASA) and CAASA in a partnership to get an idea of the key issues affecting not just South Africa, but the whole of the continent."

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Aviation Africa has teamed up with the Aviation Week Network to deliver an MRO segment to the conference. And when it comes to the issue of training, then the event will feature a debate led by the leading training data and reporting business ATM and its managing director Maximilian Buerger.

"Aviation Africa is always a big networking event. We are expecting numbers to top 1,800 this year," Brown said. "We have more than 130 exhibitors coming from around the world, looking to partner or work with African countries."

Registration is now open at [www.AviationAfrica.aero/register](http://www.AviationAfrica.aero/register)

■ As well as the main Summit agenda, which will feature airline CEOs from across the continent, major manufacturers, directors general of civil aviation authorities, airport leaders and business aviation operators, there will also be an insight theatre on the exhibition show floor which will be open to all attendees.

"We are issuing a call for papers for slots at that theatre," said conference director Mark Pilling. "There are some great sessions already lined up for that. But we hope it will be used effectively by companies with projects like future aircraft, sustainability, special services or some adventurous GA flying missions." ▲

# ▲ ALL IN A DAY

## Ryan van Wijk

Marcelle Nethersole speaks to the CEO at Alt. Academy.

IMAGE:ALT.ACADEMY

### Tell me about Alt. Academy and the training it provides

Alt. Academy is a holding company, supporting the Private Education sector in Southern Africa consisting of Alt. Academy, EPT Aviation Training and Global Training College. Through these institutions, we offer many accredited programmes ranging from airline pilot training for Boeing and Airbus, cabin crew licencing to national certificates and short courses

At Alt. Academy we believe that any industry is only as good as the next generation of dreamers, achievers and high-flyers that it produces. Which is why, through our three prestigious institutions, we've dedicated ourselves to training, nurturing, and inspiring the next generation of leaders.

Alt. Academy is a leading South African aviation training institution. We have combined educational expertise with industry know-how to offer comprehensive, world-leading instruction and practical experience.

At Alt. Academy, we offer training for both Boeing and Airbus aircraft, specifically the B737 and A320, respectively. Our customer base includes South Africa, Africa in general, India, South America, and Pakistan.

### How can the African youth be inspired to enter the aviation industry?

This is a subject that is very important to me: we need to empower young people and provide them with opportunities to be part of this amazing industry. This goes beyond just becoming pilots; it includes ground staff positions such as tug drivers, check-in agents, ramp controllers, operations control, cabin crew, pilots, instructors, and more.

So, how does Alt. Academy contribute to this? Well, we strongly believe in ethical business practices and changing people's lives. We have built a vast network of potential employers, to whom we provide highly-skilled learners who have achieved excellent results and shown a strong willingness to succeed.

Additionally, we also sponsor students on a yearly basis to come and learn with us at Alt. Academy and EPT Aviation. As an organisation, we are committed to doing business that benefits and uplifts people.

### How do you see the future growth of the aviation industry in Africa?

The future growth of the African continent is expected to be challenging, despite the existence of growth opportunities.

There is a willingness among various stakeholders to collaborate. However, the strict visa control policies in many countries are driving businesses away. It is imperative for us to unite and unlock the true potential of Africa.



🌀 We need to empower young people and provide them with opportunities to be part of this amazing industry. 🌀

### What sets Alt. Academy apart from its training competitors?

Our people are what distinguishes us from our competitors, first and foremost.

Furthermore, we boast world-class facilities and equipment.

Our distinct advantage lies in our ability to stay abreast of market trends and training philosophies, thanks to our small and agile team, allowing us to offer tailored solutions and respond swiftly to changes.

### What does a typical day hold for you in your role?

My day revolves around ensuring that my staff and operations function at optimal levels. I also make sure that the company is on track with our strategic plans, by engaging with airlines, simulator manufacturers, and exploring potential synergies and opportunities for growth in the African market, among others.

I also enjoy attending aviation events, such as Aviation Africa, which will take place in Johannesburg in September. Such conferences allow the role players to engage and ensure we can support one another all while concentrating on our main business objectives.

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