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TIMES Aerospace Publishing Ltd
3-4 Rumsey House
Locks Hill, Rochford
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Tel: +44 (0)1702 53 0000
Fax: +44 (0)1702 53 3088

Website: www.timesaerospace.aero

Publisher:
Mark Brown
Mark.brown@aviationweek.com

Display Advertising:
Grant Lee
Grant.lee@aviationweek.com

Circulation Dept:
Abi Aherns
Abi.Aherns@aviationweek.com

Editorial:
news@timesaerospace.aero

Editor-in-Chief:
Alan Peaford

Deputy Editor: Marcelle Nethersole
ella@aerocomm.aero

Managing Editor: Mark Pilling

Editorial head office:
Aerocomm Ltd,
Norths, Rectory Road, Orsett, Essex
RM16 3JU UK.

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Sorry, we can't expect SAATM anytime soon

The 8th Aviation Africa Summit, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on September 16-17, was not the first, and most certainly will not be the last, conference hall echoing to calls to speedily open up the continent's air transport industry.

The key project to drive pan-African air transport liberalisation is the African Union's flagship Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) project. SAATM was officially launched in 2018 with the commitment of 23 states to create a single unified air transport market.

The African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC), which is tasked with its implementation, says SAATM is transformational, creating "a single market by deregulating air services and opening regional air markets to transnational competition. The undertaking is expected to support the advancement of the continent's socio-economic development and to increase Intra-African Air Connectivity."

The logic of creating liberalised air transport markets is obvious: lower fares; greater consumer choice; more services. It has been done before: the USA deregulated its airline scene in 1978; Europe did it in 1993.

What is your bet for when a date for African liberalisation – and the final arrival of SAATM – can sit alongside 1978 and 1993? Within a decade? Within two decades? It has not and will not be a speedy process.

Dates aside, what is the right pace to implement Africa's single market? Of the 55 countries in Africa, how many have functioning airlines capable of standing strong in an

open market? Fewer than most would like.

Africa is a hard market for the continent's carriers to make money – everything is more expensive than nearly anywhere else from fuel to airport and ATC charges. Those making the most money from Africa are not based there.

These factors place a serious drag on liberalisation. So, what did Aviation Africa tell us about the prospects for advancing SAATM?

Firstly, there were calls for AFCAC to be given more teeth to drive change. That sounds sensible. There was also a proposal that each state appoints a minister specifically responsible for the implementation of SAATM. That could work, or could turn into another layer of bureaucracy.

In addition, it was highlighted how the SAATM Pilot Implementation Project (PIP) is bearing first fruit. The PIP is an initiative designed to boost the implementation of SAATM where clusters of like-minded countries come together to move liberalisation measures forward.

Eleven new city pairs have been launched via this acceleration project with hopes that this number will grow to over 30 new city pairs within a year.

Delivering SAATM is a hugely complicated step-by-step process needing subtle political manoeuvring and continuous stakeholder persuasion.

There is no big bang for SAATM. It will take patience, application and skill. African air transport leaders say the players are in place to deliver but be ready for a long game.

Mark Pilling, Managing Editor



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IMAGE: LOCKHEED MARTIN

Lockheed Martin welcomes Egypt to the C-130J Super Hercules fleet

Lockheed Martin will deliver two C-130J-30 Super Hercules tactical airlifters to the Egyptian Air Force (EAF) through a foreign military sale with the U.S. Air Force. "Egypt is a distinguished C-130 operator, relying on the EAF's large Hercules fleet to support some of the most challenging mission requirements," said Rod McLean, vice president and general manager of Lockheed Martin's air mobility and

maritime missions line of business. "Welcoming Egypt to the C-130J Super Hercules global fleet is an honour that truly represents the longstanding partnership between our two nations and with Lockheed Martin. "Through these new C-130J-30s, the EAF's tactical airlift presence will deliver unmatched capabilities and aligned force amplification to better serve Egypt, north Africa and the world."

Cameroon opportunities

Vallair, an MRO and mature aircraft asset specialist, and the Cameroon Civil Aviation Authority (CCAA) have signed an MoU to cooperate in training, aircraft maintenance, aircraft disassembly, and workforce training and development.

The agreement has identified the global requirement for qualified airworthiness, maintenance and tear down personnel, and consider the economic opportunities at secondary airports in Cameroon to establish these activities.

Peace work

AirExplore has signed a contract with Nigeria-based Air Peace to lease four aircraft from November 2024 through to March 2025.

The four Boeing 737-800 aircraft will operate under a damp-lease agreement to bolster Air Peace's capacity. AirExplore provides the aircraft, pilots, maintenance, and insurance, with Air Peace providing the remaining cabin crew for domestic flights within Nigeria.

MPM cargo facility

Menzies Aviation has opened its new cargo facility at Maputo International Airport (MPM) in Mozambique. The state-of-the-art facility means that Menzies can now handle cargo at MPM, increasing Mozambique's freight capacity. This represents a significant expansion in Menzies' footprint across East Africa. The new cargo warehouse enables Menzies to offer efficient and safe services to airlines, including launch customers Airlink and Qatar

Airways. Menzies Aviation has been operational at Maputo International Airport since 2018, operating as National Aviation Services until 2022.

French connection

Air France and Madagascar Airlines have signed a commercial cooperation agreement aimed at improving air services between France and Madagascar. "This partnership marks a major step in the implementation of the Phoenix 2030 Plan launched by the company's executive management at the beginning of 2024," said Thierry de Bailleul, CEO of Madagascar Airlines. "Never before have services to Madagascar's domestic destinations offered such a high quality of connections with long-haul flights." ■ National trust – page 12.



Ethiopian Airlines' Group CEO, Mesfin Tasew and Dar's director of operations in Ethiopia Tariq Al-Qanni, sign the contract for Mega Airport City at Abusera in Bishoftu city. IMAGE: ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES

Ethiopian and Dar Al-Handasah to develop Mega Airport City

Ethiopian Airlines Group has signed a technical advisory and consultancy contract with Dar Al-Handasah consultants to embark on the design and supervision of a Mega Airport City at Abusera in Bishoftu city.

Upon completion, the new airport is projected to have the capacity to serve 110 million passengers each year, which is four times the current capacity of Bole International Airport. Ethiopian Airlines' Group CEO, Mesfin Tasew, said: "The project will not only enhance connectivity, but also drive economic growth and prioritise environmentally-responsible practices in our country and beyond, reflecting the airline's commitment to innovation and sustainability. "With its exceptional capacity and world-class facilities, this new airport promises to elevate African aviation and strengthen partnerships, marking a significant advancement for the region's air travel infrastructure."

ATR-500 for Kenya

Kenyan operator Renegade Air and aircraft manufacturer ATR have introduced the first ever ATR-500 aircraft in Kenya. The ATR-500, leased from Abelo, has been converted into a cargo configuration to meet the specific needs of Renegade Air's operations.

The largest market for turboprops in Africa, with more than 80 aircraft of the type currently flying, Kenya could accommodate many additional ATR-500 and latest generation-600 series aircraft, from both Wilson Airport and JKIA International Airport, to serve regular domestic and international routes.

BASA deal

Oman has entered into a new bilateral air service agreement (BASA) with Tanzania, aimed at enhancing and expanding air transport between the two nations.

The revised BASA agreement will facilitate collaboration between aviation companies in Oman and Tanzania, focusing on the advancement of travel and tourism, data sharing, analytics, and the utilisation of airport infrastructure.

Airlink's E175 lease

Falko Regional Aircraft delivered its Embraer E175 aircraft on lease to Airlink in September. The aircraft were delivered on behalf of



Anbessie Yitbarek, Boeing vice president of commercial sales and the honourable minister of aviation and aerospace, Festus Keyamo, sign the agreement. IMAGE: BOEING

Boeing's boost to Nigeria's aviation ecosystem

Boeing and the Federal Ministry of Aviation and Aerospace Development of Nigeria have signed an MoU to strengthen the West African country's aviation sector.

Honourable minister of aviation and aerospace Festus Keyamo, said: "As Africa's largest economy and with the continent's largest population, Nigeria has a lot to offer in driving the growth of aviation in Africa."

"The support to be provided through this agreement will help our local operators grow and succeed, which is a priority of the president Bola

Ahmed Tinubu administration. We are keen to work assiduously with Boeing in the coming months and years to make this a reality."

As part of a strategic relationship with the ministry and Nigerian airlines, Boeing will provide planning workshops, training, technical support and assessments to airline operators.

Anbessie Yitbarek, Boeing vice president of commercial sales for Africa said: "The importance of Nigeria for Boeing lies in its rich potential to foster economic growth, connect people, and shape the future of aviation in Africa and beyond."

Falko managed fund, Falko Regional Aircraft Opportunities Fund II (Fund II) with the first two deliveries concluding in Q4 2023 and the final two deliveries in August and September 2024. Airlink now operates E170, E175 and E190 aircraft from Falko's managed portfolio.

Airlink CEO, Rodger Foster said: "The leased Embraer E175s from Falko

provide us with the flexibility to provide a consistent top-quality onboard service across a wider band of routes across our network."

Afrijet orders ATR

Gabonese airline Afrijet has signed a firm order for one ATR 42-600, with an option for one more, with regional aircraft manufacturer ATR.

The aircraft will replace Afrijet's former generation ATR 42-500, offering advanced passenger amenities to serve the regional air travel needs of the Gabonese communities.

It will join FlyGabon's fleet of two ATR 72-600. The delivery of the first aircraft is planned for 2025, and the option is to be delivered in 2026.

A220 delivery

TAAG Angola Airlines has taken delivery of its first Airbus A220, an A220-300 from the Airbus Mirabel site, in Canada. The aircraft livery features the PALANCA (a black antelope considered a national symbol) on the plane's tail and winglets, as well as the colour pattern inspired by Angola's traditional fabric named 'Samakaka.'

Train team

AFRAA and EgyptAir Training Academy have signed an MoU on training that will facilitate a framework of collaboration between AFRAA and EgyptAir Training. It will support the development of sustainable and safe air transport system in Africa and effectively contribute to the continent's economic development and integration.

Ethiopian alliance

Ethiopian MRO and ATR have signed a letter of intent aimed at developing Ethiopian MRO's ATR aircraft maintenance and training capabilities.

The cooperation will cover the development of Ethiopian MRO's maintenance capabilities for ATR aircraft types and the establishment of a local spares stock to reduce response time for ATR operators in the region. It will also explore collaborative ways to train new ATR pilots with the Ethiopian pilot academy.

Air Tanzania extends partnership with APG

APG is to expand its longstanding general sales and service agent (GSSA) partnership with Air Tanzania to 13 further markets following an official request for proposal (RFP) process by the carrier. This development will 'significantly' increase Air Tanzania's global footprint, opening up new markets for sales on Air Tanzania's extensive network.

Effective immediately, APG will represent Air Tanzania as their general sales agent (GSA) in Austria, Belgium, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Kuwait, Nigeria, Pakistan, Portugal, Qatar, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Ukraine.

"We are delighted to extend our partnership with Air Tanzania into these key markets," said Richard Burgess, president of APG Network. "This collaboration aligns perfectly with APG's mission to deliver easy accessibility to global markets for our airline partners. We look forward to leveraging our extensive network and expertise to support Air Tanzania's sales growth and enhance customer service across these regions."



IMAGE: BOEING

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Alcinda Pereira, the first woman to lead AfBAA, wants to change the mentality of business aviation in Africa by filling the region's connectivity gap.

Marcelle Nethersole spoke to her on the side-lines of Aviation Africa.

LET'S MAKE AN EXECUTIVE DECISION

Executive aviation plays a crucial role in Africa, both in terms of connectivity and in the economic development of the region. This is the message of Alcinda Pereira, chair of AfBAA and co-founder of Angola's successful Bestfly.

"A business jet is not a luxury, it is a tool that gets you from A to B – this is a reality we want to push in Africa," she said.

She added that executive aviation provides a 'fast, efficient and crucial' way to travel between countries and regions within Africa – a diverse continent where land transportation options may be very limited.

Pereira is referring to the 'multitude of gaps' when it comes to Africa's connectivity maps, saying the executive aviation sector should not just be aimed at leaders in government, or VIPS.

She went on to offer strong examples of the lack of connectivity, mainly due to lack of communication with governments often resulting in lack of permits between nations.

"A mining investor or corporation in Durban, South Africa, for example, might want to visit a potential site in the Copperbelt in Zambia. To fly commercially, the fastest possible time is 18 hours 35 minutes, including two changes – and with no guarantees of on-time arrivals and connections.

"By car it would take almost 28 hours without stops," she explained.

"With a private plane, the distance is just 1,000nm and a midsize jet like the Challenger 350 would do the mission in just two hours. An executive, industry leader, investor and the team that supports them could be there and back home with their families the same day. The alternative transport would be a three-day trip for the same time meeting. So, having a 'tool' to do business like a private plane – a jet or turboprop – the value is immeasurable."

Pereira also shared her own experience of her nation's national basketball team, due to attend an international sports event and being let down.

"Angola's national federation had chartered an aircraft to take both the men and women's teams to

the event," she explained. "A flight permit request had been made in good time to the host country. As the players arrived at the airport at 5am the clearance had still not been granted. Twelve hours later the disgruntled players went home.

"The aircraft had sat on the tarmac all that time – and still no flight permit. It destroyed some hopes and dreams that day. This incident is typical of the barriers Africa's executive aviation industry faces."

Not many of us may have heard of the city of Lubumbashi. It is the second-largest city in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, we should know it.

"Lubumbashi is one of the richest places on our continent, and do you know why?"

Pereira then picked up my mobile phone and said: "Because of these. Mobile phones/cell phones, whatever you call them, they are made from the natural product in Lubumbashi, and the world relies on them. Yet, there is no easy access route for the workers. The examples I have given you, are just a few of too many."

As chair of AfBAA, Pereira wants to see the process of Africa matching other parts of the world, such as Europe and the U.S., allowing the sector to thrive for the benefit of all.

"We need to look at a number of areas to highlight the benefit of business aviation, such as security," she said. "Business aviation is increasing investment into ensuring secure and private environments in the air and on the ground. Meeting preparations can be done in the air with nobody else potentially listening in.

"We need to look into stimulating tourism and business. Executive aviation makes it easier for tourists and business travellers to visit Africa, which can boost the tourism sector and attract foreign investment to the region. South Africa has been ahead of the rest of the continent with its private internal flights to game lodges, to cities and places not served well by the airlines. It has approximately 450/550 business aircraft movements."

Pereira is keen to mention that infrastructure is also an important topic for African governments to work together on.

She said: "AfBAA represents the interests of the sector across the whole African continent – all 54 countries. Believe it or not, the executive aviation sector plays an important role in developing airport infrastructure and related services, which can benefit the local economy as a whole.

"There are opportunities for airports to ensure that the business aviation sector is supported by appropriate facilities. FBOs – or executive terminals – maintenance facilities that are of a standard comparable to the rest of the world."

"Of course, this, it cannot be forgotten, all leads to job creation – which is hugely needed on the continent.

"Executive aviation generates direct and indirect jobs in areas such as airport operations, aircraft maintenance, catering services, logistics and more, thus contributing to economic growth and income generation in the region," said Pereira.

"Let me tell you, in Europe – a geographic area a quarter the size of Africa – employs 450,000 people in business aviation alone and generates 100 billion Euros in economic output annually. Business aviation connects 1,400 European airports, of which only 500 are connected by commercial airlines."

Pereira, co-founder of BestFly, along with her husband, Nuno Pereira, said their experience of working with the Angolan government is proof that things can change.

"BestFly has had an FBO with a full service for 12 years now – I mean a VIP terminal with all the services with customs, immigration and police. This service is very difficult to find in Africa, but we managed to do it in Angola because we had the support of our government," said Pereira.

BestFly has also made a bid for the new airport in Luanda, Angola's capital.

"We had a small consortium with the other two partners, but we are the Angolan partner of this consortium which is bidding for the management of the new airport."



“A business jet is not a luxury, it is a tool that gets you from A to B – this is a reality we want to push in Africa.”

ALCINDA PEREIRA

"At this stage, it's open only for cargo flights, but in November, they are aiming to be open to all the flights. The only thing that is not certain at this stage is the private jets as questions are being raised as to where they are going to put them.

"So, we are still waiting for the government to decide that but they're being very cooperative, and BestFly is an example of how Africa throughout can operate."

Touching on being chair of AfBAA, Pereira said she likes to address herself as a 'share person'.

"One of the things that I would like to bring to AfBAA is a new mentality," she explained. "I joined AfBAA 14 years ago, and this was a dream that myself and Nuno had with Tarek Ragheb, the former vice president international for the Middle East and Africa at Gulfstream, and we had a dream to bring more standards and to bring a more technical side for Africa as well, as well as make use of all the natural resources it has.

"I would also like to mention that it is important to me to help the future generations of this industry, of both men and women, in Africa, because young people need to have guidance, they need to be educated."

Pereira concluded that business aviation 'is different' to commercial air transport, but it is still very much a significant cog in the wheel of air transport as a whole.

"Issues like permits continue to be a thorn in the side of our industry and one of the biggest issues that affects the progress of the sector, but failure to understand it, can lead to diplomatic reputation concerns.

"At the end of the day, the key message is that, collectively, all governments and stakeholders of our industry make sure that we as Africans will implement the best practices on our continent, the diversity of countries brings diversity of challenges, but I still believe that some of us will change the mentality, change the way to conduct business because we are proud Africans. As the AfBAA campaign said: "No Plane – No Gain" and that is a message to Africa's governments too." ▲



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Madagascar's de Bailleul



Thierry de Bailleul: "The whole spirit of this plan is to become a reliable domestic airline again before possibly becoming an international airline again." IMAGE: MADAGASCAR

A newly-revived Madagascar Airlines is focused on regaining confidence by achieving a reliable and profitable domestic operation. CEO Thierry de Bailleul talked to Mark Pilling.

A government determined to set up a well-managed, independent airline; a leader capable of building a team to deliver a business plan designed to make money; and a financier prepared to fund it all, appear to be the right mix of ingredients to give Madagascar's new flag carrier a fighting chance of success.

Air transportation is a critical resource for this massive island off the east coast of Africa in the India Ocean, an area larger than France. It is needed to feed passengers from the capital Antananarivo, located in the centre of the island, to its breath-taking coastal tourism destinations.

The task of developing a business plan capable of achieving the country's goals was given to Thierry de Bailleul, who was appointed by the country's president in November 2022. De Bailleul is an experienced airline leader with stints in senior roles at Qatar Airways, Emirates and Air France-KLM.

Madagascar Airlines began operating in April 2022 as a new indirectly state-owned entity, taking over operations from the country's loss-making international and domestic carriers that had gone into bankruptcy.



For many years the country has had a variety of flag carrier incarnations. Generally, the airlines had one thing in common: mismanagement and political interference, a situation found in many countries around Africa as well as elsewhere, leading to an ailing business.

The new Madagascar Airlines was going to be different, but when de Bailleul arrived it was already not in great shape. It was losing money, racking up debt, had commitments for aircraft that he believed were unnecessary and continuing with unprofitable international services.

The answer was in de Bailleul's view "quite straightforward. First, put the fleet right and put in place the resources so that we reach operational excellence. Second, we had a huge delay on the digital side. So, there is a whole batch of investments dedicated to digital.

"The third and key part in my mind is trust because it was an airline that had lost all the trust from customers and from airline partners because in the past there were lots of cancelled and delayed flights and missed passenger connections," said de Bailleul.

"The whole spirit of this plan is to become a reliable domestic airline again before possibly becoming an international airline again," he added.

A crucial element of the plan was money. Almost as soon as he arrived in Madagascar, one of de Bailleul's first responsibilities was to meet with the regional head of the World Bank. The bank is a global institution providing low-interest loans, zero to low-interest credits, and grants to developing countries.

"I knew the bank was interested by the [Madagascar Airlines revival] project, but only under certain conditions that were not yet met. And maybe they wanted to size us up a little bit," said de Bailleul.

He presented his plan, dubbed Phoenix 2030, to the World Bank team and received positive signs that the bank would support it.

rebuilds the national trust



Madagascar Airlines currently operates a fleet of five ATR72s. IMAGE: MADAGASCAR AIRLINES

To put his plan in place and bring the World Bank on board de Bailleul needed two things. Firstly, a governance structure that allowed management to execute the business plan free and secondly formal approval from the state and its authorities to execute the plan.

It took a year, but in November 2023 de Bailleul got the green light from the government. This triggered a \$70 million loan package from the World Bank to the Malagasy Government to re-finance Madagascar Airlines. De Bailleul acted swiftly. All long-haul operations, using expensive ACMI aircraft, were suspended and a plan to acquire three Embraer E190-E2s was axed.

At the start of 2024, the first tranche of money from the World Bank was used to bring four of its ATR72s, which had been cannibalised for parts to keep a further two of the type flying, back into service, said de Bailleul.

From September the carrier will have five operational ATR72s in its fleet, as some leased aircraft were returned, while a sixth arrives in April 2026. The carrier will also bring in its own stock of spares for the ATR72s.

This fleet size is sufficient for the airline to re-organise its schedule to introduce two banks at hub Antananarivo, so travellers have two opportunities every day to connect to the dozen

major cities around Madagascar's coastline.

"It is an important move with the aspiration of encouraging mobility in the country and enable business," said de Bailleul.

The hub move is also designed for Madagascar Airlines to offer services that will attract carriers like Air France and Emirates as partners, which is in train.

Another part of this plan has seen the carrier re-join IATA's Billing and Settlement Plan after a decade away enabling it to re-establish interline agreements with other airlines. It has also gone with just one GDS – Amadeus – with the old airline structure having two GDS in place and will relaunch its website in October.



With all these actions the aim is to reach break even by the end of 2025, said de Bailleul.

The airline is in an advantageous position with no domestic airline rival and land travel is slow and difficult.

"The roads are not a competitor. The train is not a competitor. If we do our job well as a team, and if we find a way to reduce the high fuel cost issue in Madagascar, then we can have a 20 per cent profitability," he explained.

"This is why I think we should get back to the international side because we should make enough money on the domestic to accept a small financial and economic risk to re-establish on long-haul."

After Covid, traffic in Madagascar dwindled to just 350,000 passengers annually. De Bailleul conservatively predicts 15-20 per cent passenger growth for the coming six years with 750,000 passengers hoped for by 2028, which is consistent with the government ambition to reach one million tourists by that time. ▲

SOMMAIRE

RÉTABLIR LA CONFIANCE DANS AÉRIENNE MALGACHE

La compagnie aérienne malgache relancée récemment s'efforce de réaliser une activité nationale fiable et rentable, explique le PDG Thierry de Bailleul.

Un gouvernement déterminé à créer une compagnie aérienne indépendante et bien gérée, un dirigeant capable de constituer une équipe pour mettre en œuvre un plan d'affaires conçu pour gagner de l'argent et un financier prêt à financer le tout, semblent être la bonne combinaison d'ingrédients pour donner à la nouvelle compagnie aérienne Malgache, une chance de réussir.

Le transport aérien est essentiel pour connecter les habitants de cette immense île et soutenir le tourisme. Nommé en novembre 2022 après avoir occupé des postes de direction chez Qatar Airways, Emirates et Air France-KLM, Thierry de Bailleul, a eu la tâche d'élaborer un business plan efficace.

Il fallait s'occuper de la flotte et mettre en place les ressources pour atteindre l'excellence opérationnelle. Il a ensuite fallu faire des investissements dans le numérique pour rattraper le retard. Il fallait aussi regagner la confiance des clients et des partenaires aériens.

Dès son arrivée, le PDG a présenté son plan, baptisé Phoenix 2030, à la Banque mondiale.

« L'esprit de ce plan est de redevenir une compagnie aérienne nationale fiable avant de

redevenir éventuellement une compagnie aérienne internationale », souligne de Bailleul.

Toutes les opérations long-courriers, utilisant des avions ACMI coûteux, ont aussi été suspendues et le projet d'acquisition de trois Embraer E190-E2 a été abandonné.

Début 2024, la première tranche le financement de la Banque mondiale a été utilisée pour remettre en service quatre de ses ATR72.

En septembre, le transporteur devait avoir cinq ATR72 opérationnels dans sa flotte. Un sixième est attendu en avril 2026.

Par ailleurs, le transfert de son hub permettra à Madagascar Airlines d'offrir des services pouvant attirer des partenaires comme Air France et Emirates.

Outre la France, d'autres destinations européennes sont envisagées (Europe de l'Est, Allemagne et Italie).

De Bailleul espère atteindre la rentabilité financière d'ici fin 2025. Il prévoit une croissance de 15 à 20 % du nombre de passagers pour les six prochaines années, soit 750 000 passagers d'ici 2028, en ligne avec l'ambition du gouvernement d'atteindre un million de touristes d'ici là. ▲

Privately-owned Fly Angola is steadily re-opening a handful of international routes, in addition to a single domestic service, following the cessation of all scheduled operations in August 2023. **Mark Pilling** reports.



Fly Angola operates two 50-seat Embraer EMB-145s and one De Havilland Dash 8-300 from its Luanda base. IMAGE: FLY ANGOLO

BACK IN THE WORLD...

“We are very cautiously re-opening our routes after temporarily suspending scheduled flights last year,” Belarnício Muangala, CEO of Luanda-based Fly Angola told *African Aerospace*. “Our aim is to open point-to-point services looking to serve under-served and strategic markets that complement and even feed [flag carrier] TAAG.”

The carrier, which operates two Embraer EMB-145s and one De Havilland Dash 8-300, stopped flying except for charter services after operating costs soared amid a devaluation of the country’s currency, the kwanza.

In March, its first re-started domestic route was Luanda to Cabinda, an enclave and province in the north, but detached from Angola, hence heavily reliant on aviation services to access the rest of the country, said Muangala.

FlyAngola is flying this route under a government public service obligation contract. While the state covers a significant part of the ticket price paid by the customer, the payment comes to the airline several months later which is a cash flow challenge, explained Muangala. This is, however, the country’s largest domestic market and is also served by state-owned carrier TAAG.

Just a few days before Fly Angola began its first ever scheduled international service: a twice-weekly service to the island of São Tomé and Príncipe. “In fact, this is the first time any private Angolan airline launches scheduled service to anywhere outside the country,” said Muangala.

“We prefer regional international routes that are very close, but completely underserved, with terrible alternative connections and very expensive for passengers – with a negative impact in trade, tourism and visitor numbers,” he noted.

“Our next launch will be Luanda to Namibian capital Windhoek via Lubango [a city in the south of Angola]. To our surprise, the Namibian authorities were very quick and swift to approve and issue the necessary operating permits. It is from the Angolan side that we are getting all sorts of delays, but we hope to start shortly,” he added. “This is one of the most important routes for southern Angola and it used



to be served by TAAG in the exact same way we are proposing to fly, but we have to wait.”

If it can obtain the necessary approvals, Fly Angola has ambitions to open a base at Lubango, which has no international services at present, and expand from that airport with additional service to other international destinations, said Muangala.

Another regional route launch, anticipated for this year, is Luanda to Pointe-Noir in the Republic of Congo, a one-hour flight which used to be served on a weekly basis by TAAG, but has been abandoned in August 2024.

“This is a typical 50-seater regional route and Luanda has the best connections to highly-demanded cities, such as Lisbon, São Paulo, Maputo or Johannesburg. Our goal would be to feed those TAAG routes with this regional flight and contribute to the development of the Luanda hub together with the national carrier,” said Muangala.

Fly Angola, which is owned by Angolan business interests, will stick with its 50-seater aircraft for now. “Our fleet is about right for our needs as we re-start our scheduled operations,” said Muangala.

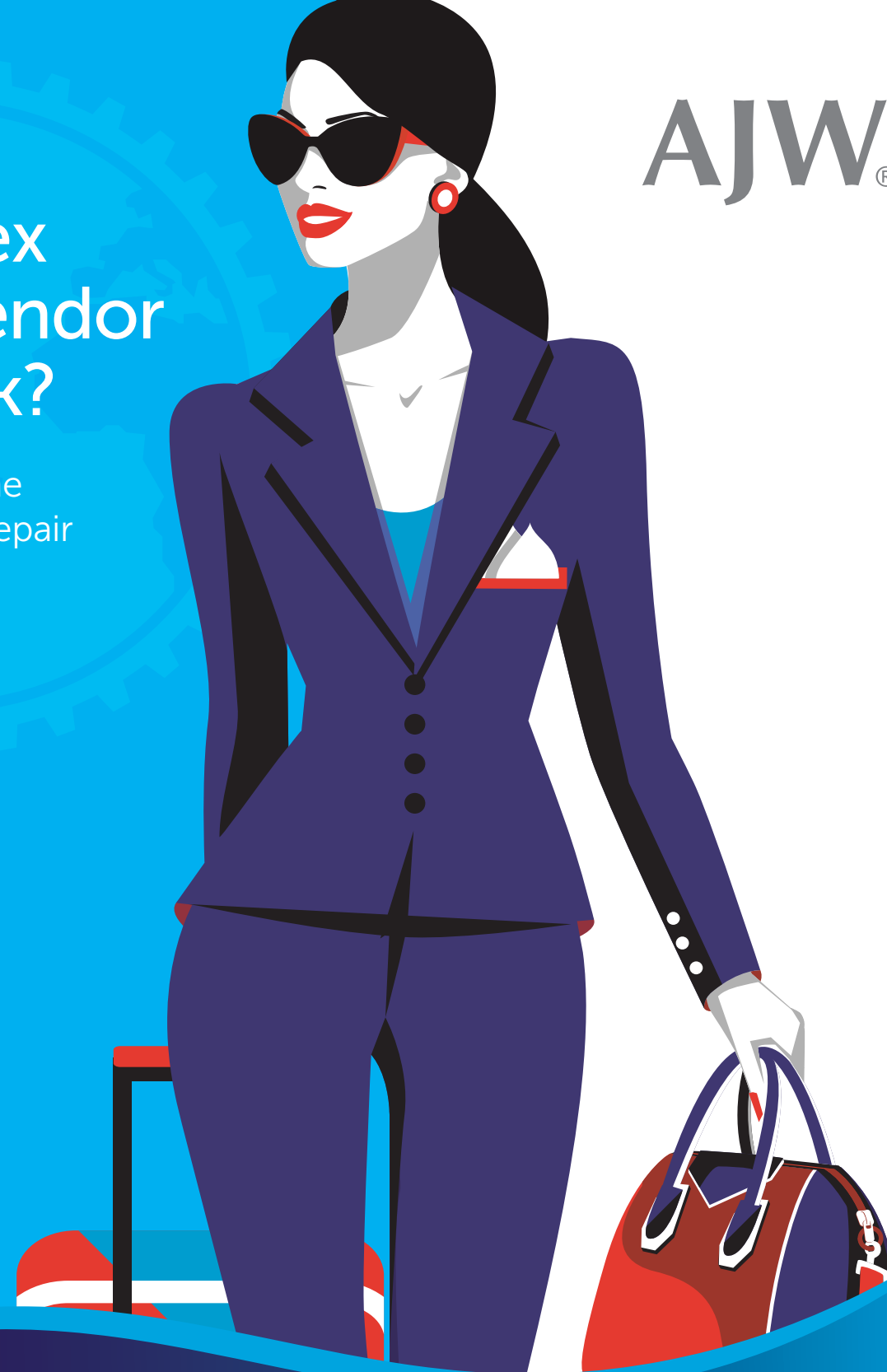
In November, the carrier is also looking forward to transferring its operations from the existing Quatro de Fevereiro International Airport in capital Luanda to the new Agostinho Neto International Airport (ANIA), which has been developed at a cost of \$5.8 billion to help position the Angola as a southern Africa hub. ▲

▼ We prefer regional international routes that are very close, but completely underserved. ▲
BELARNÍCIO MUANGALA

IMAGE: FLY ANGOLO

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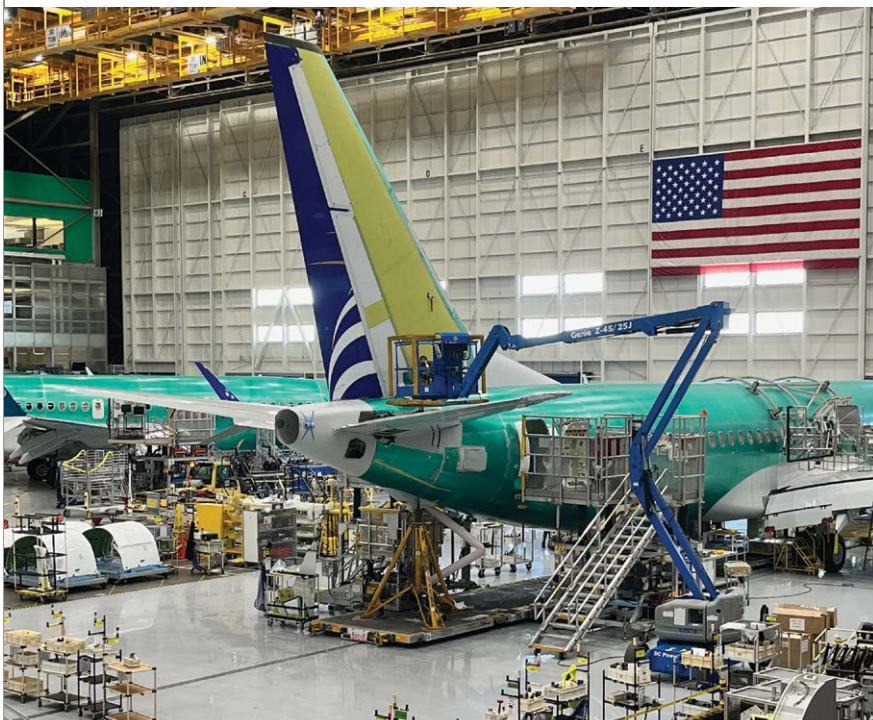


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To what extent will Boeing's problems affect African airlines? Alan Dron visited the manufacturer's Seattle home as it outlined how it is trying to solve quality conundrums in its supply chain and on its assembly lines.

Why Africa won't shut the door on Boeing



Boeing is implementing a series of measures on its 737 assembly lines at Renton, Washington State, to iron out quality problems.

IMAGE: ALAN DRON

January's explosive decompression of a Boeing 737-9 caused shock waves throughout the US manufacturer and its suppliers.

The in-flight loss of a door plug occurred shortly after take-off from Seattle's SeaTac Airport. Miraculously, there were no fatalities, but the accident occurred due to a failure by a Boeing employee – the company has not been able to identify the individual – to re-install retaining bolts on the door plug, which covered an emergency exit that was not required on that particular model of 737.

The plug had been removed at Boeing's Renton factory to fix a fault that had not been picked up at the Wichita factory of fuselage subcontractor Spirit Aerosystems. After the fault was fixed, the plug was replaced... but without three of the four required retaining bolts. The door eventually worked loose over the course of 154 subsequent flights, before blowing off over Seattle.

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According to Elizabeth Lund, senior vice-president of quality at Boeing Commercial Aircraft, an individual or team did not create the necessary paperwork to alert staff that the bolts had been removed to allow the door plug to be opened.

The investigation into the incident has uncovered a litany of faults: in fuselages arriving from Boeing's tier one

supplier Spirit Aerosystems; a lack of training for personnel on the Renton assembly lines; and complicated processes and procedures that allowed faults to creep in.

Aware that its reputation was on the line, Boeing responded. It is bringing Spirit Aerosystems back in-house (Spirit was previously part of Boeing before being sold off in the 1990s), has put in place more basic training for new employees without previous aviation experience, beefed up mentoring and on-the-job training, and a "much more systemic check" of all such details on the aircraft has been put in place.

For example, rather than waiting until fuselages arrive at Renton from Spirit before checking them for defects, that checking process now takes place – with increased Boeing oversight – before they are loaded onto railway cars to make the journey to Washington state. That is already showing benefits in reducing the number of faults, Lund said.

The company says that its production philosophy is changing from prioritising getting aircraft out of the factory door as quickly as possible, to an intense focus on quality.

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Production rates of the 737, which were supposed to be increasing steadily over the next few years, fell to as low as 18 a month earlier this year and have been capped by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) at 38 – the rate existing prior to the Alaska Airlines incident – until the FAA is satisfied that Boeing has got a grip of the situation.

So, what does all this mean for African airlines? Probably less than in other regions of the world.

Relatively few African carriers buy new aircraft direct from Boeing. Many tend to acquire second-hand machines.

The two largest carriers with an interest in Boeing deliveries are Ethiopian and EgyptAir. Ethiopian ordered 20 737-8s and 11 787-9s at the 2023 Dubai Airshow but, mindful of the delays affecting Boeing's output even then, said that it would lease in aircraft to get it through the next few years until deliveries started to flow from the US.

EgyptAir, meanwhile, announced at the same show that it would be going straight to a lessor, Air Lease Corporation, for 18 737-8s, thus enabling earlier deliveries from early 2025 through 2026. Air Algérie has eight 737-9s on order, but these are not scheduled for delivery until 2027, giving Boeing time to fix its problems in the intervening period.

Will Boeing's problems deter African airlines from placing future orders with the US manufacturer? Probably not; both Boeing and Airbus have huge order backlogs – place an order for a Boeing 737 or an Airbus A320neo today and you are unlikely to have it in service much before the end of the decade.

African airlines that want to order from Boeing will probably take comfort from the fact that, by the time the new aircraft arrive, the company's current problems will – hopefully – have been ironed out. ▲



SOARING HIGH: THE RISE OF AFRICA'S LEADING UAV SERVICE PROVIDER

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In August the Qatar Airways Group announced that it had acquired a 25 per cent stake in Southern African regional carrier, Airlink, Guy Leitch reports.

Airlink stake strengthens Qatar's growth in Africa

Qatar is expanding aggressively into Africa. As well as its Airlink investment, Qatar is currently finalising the acquisition of a 49 per cent stake in RwandAir and will have a 60 per cent stake in a new airport being built outside Kigali.

Africa is seen as the next big aviation growth opportunity. The African Airlines Association (AfRAA) said: "There was a six per cent increase from 15 million seats in June 2023 to 16 million seats in June 2024. Intra-Africa routes also saw a 0.5 per cent rise in seat availability during the same period, attributed to the introduction of new routes, network expansion, and fleet upgrades."

Qatar currently offers 180 flights per week to various destinations across Africa. The airline's investment in Airlink will enhance their existing code-sharing partnership. When code-share partners are included, the number expands to more than 900 weekly flights across the continent.

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Speaking in July, Qatar Airways vice president for Africa, Hendrik du Preez, said: "With 18 per cent of the world's population, and making up less than two per cent of air transport activity, Africa is an untapped market with increasing travel and business opportunities."

"We are expanding connectivity throughout the continent by increasing the number of destinations we serve, and the frequencies we offer, and through partnerships with African airlines."

At the announcement in Doha, Qatar Group CEO, Badr Mohammed Al-Meer, said: "Our investment in Airlink demonstrates how integral we see Africa being to our business' future. This partnership not only demonstrates our confidence in Airlink, as a company that is resilient, agile, financially robust and governed on sound principles, but also in Africa as a whole."

Airlink chief executive Rodger Foster said: "Having Qatar Airways as an equity partner is a powerful endorsement of Airlink and echoes our faith in the markets we currently serve and plan to add to our network."

"This transaction will unlock growth by providing efficiencies of scale, increasing our capacity and expanding our marketing reach. By



Done deal: Rodger Foster and Qatar's Badr Mohammed Al-Meer exchange agreements at the signing ceremony.

IMAGE: QATAR

bolstering Airlink and its business, this investment will strengthen all of the existing airline partnerships Airlink has nurtured over the years."

Airlink is a network route operator and thus well suited as a partner to Qatar. CEO Rodger Foster said that Airlink currently operates to 15 countries across Southern Africa.

"We are operating 85,000 flights per annum. This gives us the balance sheet to be able to continue upping our game, improving and expanding our network into destinations that we don't currently operate. And, at the same time, intensifying everything that we do," Foster said.

It is expected that the partnership will allow Airlink to more quickly expand its routes into Africa. Foster said: "We have unused traffic rights to Kigali, Kinshasa, Brazzaville, Libreville, and Accra. The partnership will enable us to adopt a step-by-step approach to expand our network. However we don't at the moment have ambitions to become pan-African."

Qatar Airways currently flies to 29 destinations in Africa and there's been strong growth with new destinations added. Abidjan, Abuja, Accra, Harare, Kano, Luanda, Lusaka, and Port Harcourt are African cities recently added to the extensive Qatar Airways network.

Post-Covid, Airlink has been expanding into east Africa with services to Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. "The tie up with Qatar will give us a larger presence in Central Africa," Foster said.

"We have 35 other commercial airline relationships and the aim with the Qatar deal is

to bolster Airlink's position in the sub-region. We also want to enhance the connectivity that we already enjoy with those 35 airline partners."

Foster emphasised that the Qatar partnership will not result in immediate changes. He said: "We will focus on what we are doing – be the best version of ourselves that we possibly can be – that whatever we do is to the best of our ability, which means enhancing the frequencies to key destinations throughout our network and making sure that we are providing connectivity, especially to Qatar; but not limited to Qatar."

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It is not expected that the deal will be subject to significant regulatory hurdles. South Africa limits foreign (non-resident) shareholdings in South African airlines to 25 per cent. Foster points out that the Qatar 25 per cent shareholding does not change the control of the airline and that there need therefore be no lengthy approvals process from the Civil Aviation Authority for an amendment to the airline's Air Operator's Certificate – nor to its local and International Air Services Licensing Council permissions.

However, Foster pointed out that "nothing is irrevocable until all of the conditions precedent have been concluded. There are one or two conditions precedent that are outstanding at the moment."

One of the hopes for the partnership was that Airlink would be able to bulk-up its existing



IMAGE: AIRLINK

“The tie up with Qatar will give us a larger presence in Central Africa.”

RODGER FOSTER

routes and up-gauge to single-aisle narrow-body airliners, such as the Airbus A320 family or Boeing 737s.

This would then enable it to achieve hitherto elusive economies of scale and so bring its seat prices down far enough for it to compete on busy routes with the low-cost carriers such as FlySafair and Lift.

Notably too, Qatar finds itself with a surplus fleet of nine Boeing 737 Max8s, which already have a two-class cabin configuration. With their improved per-seat fuel economies over FlySafair's Boeing 737-800s, they would be ideal to increase capacity on Airlink's busier routes.

When asked if Airlink will now start competing in the very competitive low-cost carrier space in South Africa, Foster said that the two airlines business models are different, but converging.

"If we look at our business model, we are premised on a network carrier model of connectivity and on having reach into all the corners of the Earth through airline partnerships, through IATA clearing houses, the settlement plan systems and so on.

"We have to be in the global distribution system, and we have to be in an inventory-hosting system for every flight, multiplied in Airlink's case by 85,000 flights a year, for up to a year in advance," Foster said.

He explained that FlySafair and Lift operate a point-to-point and not a network-carrier model.

"We are a connecting service provider, or what we call a network-airline service provider. So Qatar will connect the dots of our network to the dots of their network in a comprehensive way to create a matrix of destinations served both by our network, through our hubs, Johannesburg and Cape Town, as well as their hub, which is Doha.

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"The low-cost carriers haven't relied on connectivity to the extent that we have, and they sell to the travelling public who need to go from Johannesburg to Cape Town, or from Cape Town to Johannesburg, and not to destinations beyond either of those two.

"Whereas everything that we do is about picking up a customer in a source market like Cape Town, and then flying them either on our own system or on the systems of our partner airlines to another destination, be it within the sub-region or anywhere else in the world."

The Qatar Airlink tie-in has been in the making for a while. Foster said: "The negotiations started in earnest probably two years ago. The due diligence started around about a year ago and was concluded about six months ago."

The acquisition announcement ended months of speculation after Qatar announced in May that it would be investing in a Southern African airline. South African Airways is known to be looking for a strategic equity partner so it was considered to have been the likely partner. Angola's TAAG was also considered a likely candidate.

When asked about the value of the transaction, Foster said: "Airlink is a private company, and given the fact that Qatar Airways is an organ of the state of Qatar, it's not something that we can divulge." ▲



En juillet dernier, le gouvernement a annoncé le renouvellement de la flotte de Congo Airways avec l'acquisition (location ou achat) de trois avions de type A320. IMAGE: CONGO AIRWAYS

CONGO EN ZONE DE TURBULENCES

Un plan d'urgence de relance a été recommandé pour sauver Congo Airways. Elle risquait de perdre son Certificat de Transporteur Aérien (CTA) et son agrément IATA le 16 septembre dernier.

Au 28 juin dernier, Congo Airways ne fonctionnait qu'avec un aéronef obtenu grâce au leasing et dont le contrat devait expirer sous peu.

En juillet dernier, le gouvernement a annoncé le renouvellement de la flotte de Congo Airways avec l'acquisition (location ou achat) de trois avions de type A320. Selon le ministre de la Communication et des médias, et porte-parole du gouvernement, Patrick Muyaya cela permettra de « résoudre la double question relative à la perte du certificat de transport aérien CTA et de l'agrément IATA à la date butoir du 16 septembre 2024 ».

Il ajoute que cela renforcera la capacité opérationnelle de Congo Airways et libèrera son potentiel encore inexploité. La relance de la compagnie est indispensable vu « son impact significatif sur la souveraineté nationale et la mobilité des personnes et des biens ainsi que sur la vie économique et sociale ».

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Signalons que le projet de créer une nouvelle compagnie aérienne fut soulevé par le gouvernement. Cependant, il ne devrait pas se faire au détriment de Congo Airways. S'ensuivirent le plan d'urgence et la location d'un avion via le leasing.

Par ailleurs, les autorités congolaises ont décidé de ne pas entrer au capital de Corsair malgré le lancement de la desserte Brazzaville-Paris.

Leur priorité : maintenir Congo Airways dans airs pour pérenniser ses opérations.

Côté ECAir, la compagnie aérienne a repris ses vols à partir du 16 mai 2024. Les passagers peuvent désormais voyager de Brazzaville à Pointe-Noire et Ollombo.

Denis Christel Sassou Nguesso, ministre de la Coopération internationale et de la promotion du

partenariat public-privé, s'est entretenu avec les représentants d'Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) sur deux projets majeurs en droit fil avec la stratégie du gouvernement. Ils ont déjà été amorcés et visent à moderniser le secteur de l'aviation et à améliorer la connectivité aérienne du pays.

Trois ARJ-21 pourraient intégrer la flotte de la compagnie. ▲

SUMMARY

CONGO AIRWAYS BACK FROM THE BRINK?

An emergency rescue plan to save Congo Airways, the flag-carrier of the Democratic Republic of the Congo – at serious risk of losing its Air Operator Certificate (AOC) and IATA approval in September this year – has been instigated.

In July the government announced the renewal of Congo Airways' fleet with the acquisition of three Airbus A320s and - according to government spokesman Patrick Muyaya (minister of communication and media) - this will enable the airline '...to resolve the dual issues relating to the loss of the AOC and IATA approval by the deadline of 16 September'.

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He explains that this will strengthen Congo Airways' operational capacity, unlocking its untapped potential as 'the revival of the company is essential, given its significant impact on national sovereignty, the mobility of people and goods, and the country's economic and social life'.

There was originally a national project by the government to create a new airline but a

consensus view, the spokesman continued, was that 'it should not be to the detriment of Congo Airways'. This was soon followed by the emergency plan - and the rental of leased aircraft.

In addition, the Congolese authorities decided not to invest in Corsair, despite the launch of its Brazzaville-Paris service, as the priority was to continue Congo Airways' operations.

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Equatorial Congo Airlines (ECAir) resumed flights from Brazzaville to Pointe-Noire and Ollombo on 16 May this year.

Denis Christel Sassou Nguesso, the country's minister for international cooperation and the promotion of public/private partnerships, has met with representatives of the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) on two major projects in line with government strategy.

They have both started, with the aim of modernising the aviation sector and improving the country's air connectivity. To this end, it's believed that three ARJ-21s could soon join the company's fleet. ▲



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HIGH VIZ: A Bateleur plane examines the contamination caused by a break in an underground fuel pipeline. IMAGE: BATELEURS

IT'S A MINEFIELD!

The South African coalfields are destroying the once verdant landscape east of Johannesburg. They are hidden from the roads and thus the only way to see the damage caused by their vast pits is to survey them from the air – with the help of a group of volunteer pilots. **Guy Leitch** investigates.

A farmer was digging drainage channels when his excavator cut through the main Durban – Johannesburg fuel pipeline. The fuel spill contaminated many dams, but again the damage was only visible from the air.

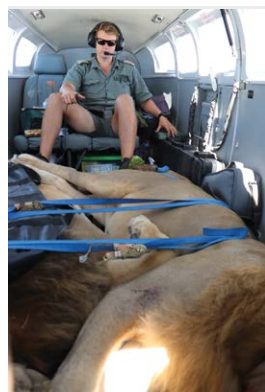
These are just two of the many examples of aerial surveys provided by volunteer private pilots flying under the Bateleurs banner.

The Bateleurs fly missions at the request of policy makers, scientists, community leaders, conservationists and environmentalists. It is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO) of pilots who freely give their aviation skills, the use of their own aircraft and their time, in support of conservation in Africa.

The Bateleurs flies for NGOs, government departments, the media, educators, researchers, parks and reserves to give them an aerial perspective of environmental problems. There is no charge to a beneficiary organisation or individual. When a beneficiary asks for a flight, the Bateleurs' assess the request and, if it is approved, find a volunteer pilot willing to fly the mission for them.

Pilot members and their aircraft provide the equivalent of 70 per cent of the annual budget. The balance is sourced through fundraising activities. Since it is not commercial, the pilot can be a private pilot. To qualify as a Bateleurs' pilot, fixed-wing, helicopter and light-sport aircraft pilots must have at least 400 hours flying time, at least 250 hours of which must be as pilot in command. Weight-shift microlight pilots must have at least 120 hours. All pilots must own, or have the use of, a suitable aircraft.

The Bateleurs is supported by grants from a number of foundations and trusts, in particular two from the UK. The organisation operates on a very tight budget. They have been in existence since 1998 but employ only one staff



Bateleur station: A vet travelling with lions being relocated. IMAGE: BATELEURS

Some Recent beneficiaries of The Bateleurs:

- Vulpro – several rescues of injured birds of prey.
- Wild dogs and cheetahs to and from Malawi.
- Project Rhino: anti-poaching support, patrolling and de-horning ops.
- Translocation of lions.

member on a full-time basis, to manage membership, coordinate missions and fundraising efforts and run the office.

The Bateleurs say that it would be out of the question for an NGO to source the funds to acquire, maintain and insure a fleet of 160 plus light aircraft – plus reimburse the costs of the pilots and aircraft owners who fly the missions requested by beneficiary organisations.

In the spirit of the maxim which says “one volunteer is worth 20 pressed men” the Bateleurs is proud to be able to say that most of their pilots come looking to fly for them, rather than in response to recruitment drives. But then the flying can be idyllic and tremendously rewarding.

In addition to flying conservation and environment missions for beneficiaries, the Bateleurs has developed an educational outreach programme called The Bateleurs Bonizwe programme. (Bonizwe is a Zulu word which means “look at the country”).

They hope to stimulate in young South Africans an awareness of conservation and environmental issues and aviation, by providing them with the hands-on experience of flying, and the insights of an aerial perspective.

The Bateleurs was started by the inimitable Nora Kreher who was heavily involved with opposing the mining of sand dunes. In the late 1990s Nora conceived The Bateleurs – based on a similar organisation of volunteer pilots in the United States, called LightHawk.

Nora played a key role in the successful fight to save the Greater St Lucia Wetlands Park from mining, was a well-known environmentalist and was also a patron and trustee of several South African conservation organisations.

The Bateleurs is now run by Steve McCurrach who can be contacted by phone on +27 828911 689 or through: www.bateleurs.org

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Africa's commercial air transport leaders gathered in Johannesburg in mid-September at the eighth Aviation Africa Summit and Exhibition, organised by Times Aerospace Events and sponsored by the South African Civil Aviation Authority.

Alan Peaford, Chloe Greenbank, Ella Nethersole, Christine Boynton and Mark Pilling report.

TIME FOR THE DOUBTERS TO CHANGE THEIR TUNE



The Domba African choir, one of Johannesburg's leading choral groups, welcomed delegates to their seats as Aviation Africa Summit 2024 kicked off. The opening address was given by Barbara Creecy (above), South Africa's Minister of Transport, in her first formal public engagement in her new role.

ALL IMAGES: AVIATION AFRICA 2024

Barbara Creecy's first formal public engagement in her new role as South Africa's Minister of Transport was to open the eighth Aviation Africa Summit and Exhibition, held at the Sandton Convention Centre in the heart of bustling Johannesburg.

Speaking to a room packed with 1,200 delegates, she addressed the Summit's central theme of 'Bridging Skies and Leveraging Growth'.

"I believe that I am speaking to the right people when I say that by strengthening co-operation among African nations and the world, we can enhance our collective air transport network, improve connectivity, and support regional trade and tourism."

With participation from 34 African countries, 92 airlines and operators and more than 100 sponsors and exhibitors, the annual Aviation Africa Summit, which was organised by Times Aerospace Events and co-sponsored by the South African Civil Aviation Authority

(SACAA), has grown into the continent's premier pan-African gathering of its kind. Times Aerospace also teamed up with the African Business Aviation Association (AFBAA) in Johannesburg, as well as working closely with numerous African and global industry associations. AFBAA held its annual meeting during the Summit.



Creecy eloquently summed up the importance of aviation to Africa. "A strong aviation network is essential for boosting tourism in Africa – aviation is a catalyst for economic growth and cultural exchange. None of it would be possible without this industry," she said.

However, as summit chair Alan Peaford observed in his opening comments, there are numerous challenges for the industry to deliver today and to unlock the undoubted growth potential of Africa.

As the sessions across the two days highlighted, each link in the value chain from airlines, regulators, airports, air

traffic management, MRO and training to finance have their issues, be they capacity, investment, human resources or governance.

Many discussions started by stressing the strong potential of African aviation, but soon moved to highlight the many obstacles to achieving it.

"Africa represents the last frontier for aviation development, but some impotent government transport strategies and ongoing protectionism practices continue to limit its success," stated Peaford.

Building on Peaford's themes, Kamil Al-Awadhi, IATA's regional vice-president for Africa and the Middle East pointed out how African airlines face institutionally higher costs than those in other continents.

"If we look at the cost to operate in Africa it is not cheap. Fuel is roughly 12-18 per cent more expensive than anywhere else in the world. The taxes,

charges and fees are also very expensive, which doesn't encourage the growth of the industry," said Al-Awadhi.

In his view, the solutions and people with experience to deliver a more successful industry are to hand in Africa, if there is the will to take them.



"We can do it ourselves if we work in a collaborative manner," said Al-Awadhi. However, "there is going to be a point of no return where you will not be able to fix it because other airlines from outside the continent can simply walk in and take over the business."

In his address John Lamola, interim CEO of South African Airways, described this group as the "notorious Middle East" carriers, referring particularly to Emirates and Qatar Airways, which have been, along with Turkish Airlines, expanding their networks aggressively into the fast-growing African market.

It is hardly surprising these carriers focus strongly on Africa, with its high

▼ Africa represents the last frontier for aviation development, but some impotent government transport strategies and ongoing protectionism practices continue to limit its success. ▲
ALAN PEAFORD

growth potential and the inability of mostly weaker African carriers to fight back. They are also investing heavily in some markets. The 25 per cent stake Qatar Airways took in South African regional carriers Airlink in September is a good example and its 49 per cent stake in RwandAir is thought to be close to being finalised.

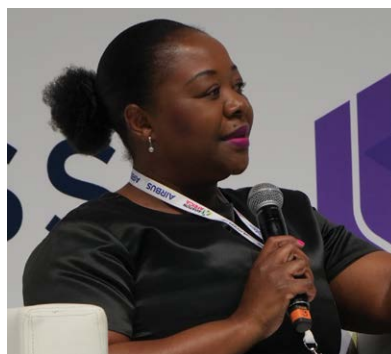
Good news for all is the rate at which traffic is returning, with IATA's Al-Awadhi forecasting that Africa will by year-end achieve full recovery compared to 2019 passenger number levels.

While there are dozens of carriers across Africa seeking to capitalise on this recovery, many are small national players with limited fleets and networks and fragile balance sheets. There are only a handful of carriers that have achieved global scale and operate significant longer-haul networks.

Henok Teferra, managing director Africa, Boeing Global, and a former leader at Ethiopian Airlines and Togo's ASky, was not alone in advocating that airline consolidation, as seen in

Continued on Page 28 ▶





Poppy Khoza: Time to empower AFCAC.

GIVE AFCAC THE TEETH TO DRIVE SAATM FORWARD

The African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC) must be given the “teeth” to drive pan-African air transport liberalisation and implement the African Union’s flagship Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) project, according to speakers on the aeropolitical panel at the summit.

“A new discussion should be, how do we make AFCAC better empowered to be able to even set regulations and have an ability to harmonise those regulations?” stated Poppy Khoza, director of civil aviation, South African Civil Aviation Authority.

Africa should look at the way Europe has organised itself in this field as an example of best practice.

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“For instance, when you are a member state of the European Union falling within EASA [EU Aviation Safety Agency], it is not just an agency, it is an agency that has teeth. Either you comply or you don’t, and if you don’t comply, there are consequences,” said Khoza.

“The single major problem that we have is a lack of implementation of programmes that we ourselves have developed for the growth and development of the economies of Africa, but led by aviation,” said Captain Gilbert Kibe, managing director of Air Transport Consulting, and a former director general of Kenya’s CAA.

SAATM was officially launched in 2018 with the commitment of 23 states to create a single unified air transport market.

Various speakers at the summit were dissatisfied with the slow pace of SAATM. “I think it’s nascent,” said Rodger Foster, CEO of South African carrier Airlink, in terms of SAATM enabling this business to open more intra-African routes. “I think it is an opportunity, but we have to do much more.”

Many states remain reluctant to expose their national carriers to the competition SAATM may bring. “My job, together with AFCAC, is to encourage member states to implement SAATM,” said Kibe. ▲

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

Europe and the US, is a must in Africa.

“For African aviation to be successful, for scheduled operators, there has to be consolidation,” declared Teferra. “Fragmentation at this level in the airline industry will not work. Size matters, because it’s a capital-driven industry.

“The objective is to have a sustainable airline,” he said. “We cannot be the exception to the world. We must talk to each other to create fleet commonality, to have equity stakes in one another, to develop together MRO and training centres and work together on the ground.”

Hearing the correct narrative around forging airline partnerships is essential from veterans of the African aviation world, such as Henok Teferra, said Aaron Munetsi, CEO of Airlines Association of Southern Africa.

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“Our responsibility is to make sure we keep everybody on track in terms of how do we work together as Africans? That is our biggest opportunity,” said Munetsi.

“There is a misconception out there,” added Munetsi. “Consolidation doesn’t mean disappearance. Maybe you have global hub-and-spoke operators, and you have feeder airlines. There is a role for everyone, but all of us cannot be global airlines in Africa, it’s not possible.”

Debates like this are essential as governments and airline CEOs operate in Africa’s high-cost environment. It is a market that is moving slowly to being more competitive as moves to drive pan-African air transport liberalisation and implement the African Union’s flagship Single African Air Transport Market



Aaron Munetsi: “We are excited that the concept of protectionism is being exposed and is beginning to come out and consolidation is being supported.”

(SAATM) project gather momentum.

However, the prospect of a more competitive intra-African market is resisted by some states and operators. “I will not shy away from confirming that there is protectionism,” said Munetsi. However, as he and other collaborators discuss SAATM with government authorities views are changing.

“We are excited that the concept of protectionism is being exposed and is beginning to come out and consolidation is being supported,” said Munetsi.

According to Poppy Khoza, director general of SACAA, who works in a country that is championing SAATM, it is not surprising that not all states feel comfortable with the single market idea. “Remember that we are dealing with a continent that that is extremely diverse, one that is fragmented by the historical issues of colonisation, where even the languages that we speak are so diverse and the cultures are so diverse,” she told delegates. “For us to have this great harmony we need a co-ordination structure that can direct. For Africa to work, we need a stronger African Civil Aviation Commission (see story, left).

“If we leave things the way that they are, and we don’t deal with the structural issues, 30 years down the line we’ll come back and talk about the same issues that we’re dealing with [today],” believed Khoza.

“But I do think that there is hope, provided we go back to the basics and say what needs to be done differently,” she concluded.

Rwanda’s minister of state for infrastructure, Olivier Kabera accepted the baton from South Africa’s transport minister Barbara Creecy, and closed the show announcing the next edition of Aviation Africa Summit and Exhibition would be in Kigali, Rwanda, September 4-5, 2025. ▲



Mpumi Mpofu: “This year marks one of the most significant infrastructure investment cycles for the airport sector.”

AFRICA’S GLOBAL

The full potential for African airports to unlock substantial economic growth and boost employment remains untapped, although new investment is on the way, according to industry leaders who spoke on the airports panel on September 16.

“This year marks one of the most significant infrastructure investment cycles for the airport sector,” said Mpumi Mpofu, CEO of Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA).

Johannesburg’s O.R. Tambo International Airport currently handles 28 million passengers annually, while Cape Town accommodates 15 million and King Shaka seven million. Beyond South Africa, other countries are making notable advancements, such as Angola, with its new 15 million passenger airport in Luanda and Ethiopia’s planned construction of a 150 million-passenger facility near Addis Ababa.

Mpofu emphasised the growing significance of

ATNS takes up the challenge

South Africa’s air navigation services provider, ATNS, had been under the cosh from the country’s airlines and airports as well as the media following suspension of instrument approaches at five airports, and failing equipment due to alleged maintenance procedural shortcomings along with a chronic shortage of air traffic controllers and other experienced staff.

On the eve of the Aviation Africa Summit, transport minister, Barbara Creecy called for urgent oversight meetings with all transport aviation entities to develop a plan to deal with resulting flight delays without compromising safety.

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.

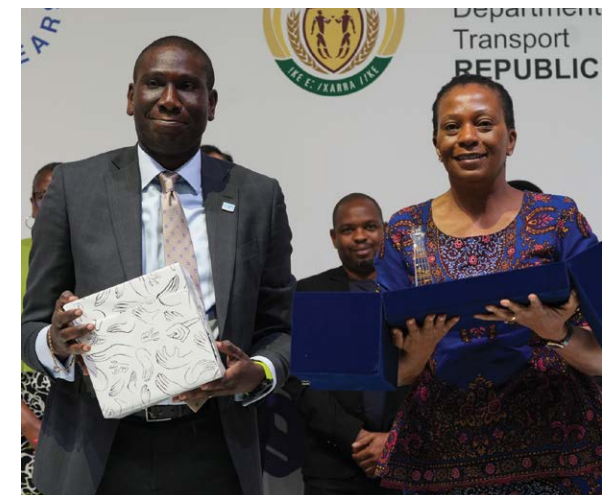
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Speaking at the summit, Sandile Hogana, chief customer solutions officer, ATNS, was confident that solutions would be found, but recognised the challenges.

“Some of those challenges are around the infrastructure where it is not always at an advanced stage,” he said. “Some of that is due to funding, because we know very well that there are so many competing priorities that governments have, for instance, does the investment go into aviation or is the investment going to be put into health?”

Like many of the key speakers, Hogana identified collaboration and cooperation as key drivers that would ensure issues are resolved. And at the Summit ATNS chief executive Nozipho Mdawe turned that to a reality when she signed an MoU with Abu Dhabi’s Global Air Navigation Services (GANS).

GANS already supports air navigation



David Abebiyi, chief commercial officer of GANS, and Nozipho Mdawe, CEO of ATNS, sign an MoU during Aviation Africa 2024.

providers in African countries such as Algeria, Kenya, Morocco, Seychelles and Namibia, as well as in a further 15 countries worldwide.

The collaboration between ATNS and GANS focuses on areas such as talent attraction and retention; training services; technology and innovation; lesson learning and collaboration on commercial opportunities.

One of the most significant challenges ATNS faces is staff retention. Many of its experienced air traffic controllers have been lured to other countries. ATNS confirmed there is a 10 per cent shortage of air traffic controllers, particularly at Johannesburg International Airport, where there are staff losses of around 10 per cent each year.

While ATNS has a medium term strategy in place with an agreement to work closely with the South African Air Force to deploy infrastructure and share resources, the collaboration with GANS could give an immediate solution with seconded staff and trainers. ▲

WORKING TOGETHER KEY TO THE FUTURE DEMANDS OF MRO

Opportunity is ahead for Africa’s MRO sector, as providers in the region work to manage and overcome key constraints. However, challenges include availability of workforce, spares, and onerous regulations, shared panelists during the MRO panel at Aviation Africa.

Collaboration among MROs will be critical in the years ahead to manage challenges, panelists concurred, including by sharing skills and assisting with capabilities where needed. And with demand growing, building local talent pipelines will be a continued focus. As newer aircraft types join fleets on the continent in larger numbers, more detailed knowledge and expertise will be required.

The region is poised to see total MRO spending valued at \$32.6 billion between 2024-2033, according to data from *Aviation Week Network*, with the highest spend expected in engine maintenance (51 per cent), followed by components (22 per cent), and line maintenance (17 per cent).

In recognition of that growth, Airbus has positioned itself to be closer to where the demand is, and where its aircraft will be, explained Cheikh Diop, Airbus global support strategy for Africa project leader. The OEM announced it will set up a customer support center in Johannesburg to strengthen its presence on the continent and support growth, including the expansion of latest generation aircraft.

“As the fleet grows, they will need to take care of it and at the moment, we see some struggling to do more than they would wish to, for different reasons — it can be talent availability or spare availability or hangar availability — whatever it is, we are willing to go beyond our OEM role,” said Diop. “We cannot be in the front seat, but we really are investing in people that can support this.” ▲



Cheikh Diop: There are multiple constraints for African carriers on the MRO front. ▲

ROLE CAN BOOST AIRPORT GROWTH

African nations in the global economy, particularly middle-income countries like Kenya, Ethiopia and Nigeria, which are all investing in their airport infrastructure. She highlighted that this wave would drive a renaissance of airport development across the continent.

Niger, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda were also all cited as key growth economies. Despite South Africa’s status as one of the continent’s largest economies, Mpofu pointed out that its growth rate lags other middle-income countries. However, with the anticipated growth in passenger traffic ACSA is moving forward with an ambitious R21.7bn investment in infrastructure development.

Infrastructure development is a crucial focus, but Mpofu stressed the need for simultaneous route expansion and capacity building. Mwamba Patience

Nkambale Phiri, airport manager at Simon Mwansa Kapwepwe Airport in Zambia, reinforced these points, highlighting the primary challenges as the need to improve policy regulations and infrastructure development.

Meanwhile, Abdoulaye Cisse, head of MEAA, Menzies Aviation highlighted the importance of securing investment, particularly through public-private partnerships (PPPs), which he views as critical to meeting airports’ financial needs.

Rampa Rammopo, CEO, Lanseria Airport, speaking from the perspective of Lanseria, a privately-owned airport with access to its own capital, shared plans to launch a cargo, FBO and MRO facility by 2025. He also emphasised the importance of diversifying revenue streams through non-aeronautical ventures to ensure financial sustainability. ▲



John Lamola: SAA will forge ahead as a 100 per cent state-owned entity.

LAMOLA OUTLINES THE SAA REBUILD

John Lamola, interim CEO at South African Airways, outlined the carrier's revival plan to delegates.

Within four to five years a revived, state-owned South African Airways (SAA) is aiming to reach a fleet size of about 50 aircraft, growing to 28 in two-three years' times and treble the size of today's fleet of 16 aircraft currently flying 15 routes, said John Lamola, interim CEO of SAA.

"Within our long-term plan is to do routes to the eastern coast of the USA and into Europe, thereby being able to diversify our income stream across the various regional markets as well as global," said Lamola.



Having survived near bankruptcy, which caused the carrier to cease flying and enter a business rescue process in December 2019, SAA returned to the skies on 23 September 2021 with just six aircraft and six routes.

Lamola explained that SAA will forge ahead as a 100 per cent state-owned entity following the government's termination of a deal with a strategic equity partner in March.

Lamola said that "the building blocks are there" to

establish a sustainable, full-service network carrier, albeit significantly smaller than it was previously. It currently operates just 16 aircraft.

The blocks include "a debt free balance sheet and an unencumbered valuable property portfolio upon which we are rebuilding," he explained. "The airline still has a brand that we believe we can build on and what is most crucial in this world where we are competing for skilled labour."

Now Lamola's team has developed a "bankable business plan to approach capital and debt markets to raise money, and it has revisited its fleet and network plan bearing in mind constrained working capital".

One of the considerations in its fleet planning is whether to deviate from its current all-Airbus fleet and it is weighing the benefits of fleet diversification, its interim CEO said, suggesting that the country's ties with China could put COMAC in the conversation.

South African minister of transport Barbara Creecy reiterated the cabinet's decision to support the re-building of SAA and the country's desire to have a flag carrier.

She also confirmed the importance of appointing a permanent CEO. The search for a full-time CEO is under way but no official date has been given for when this will be announced. ▲



Captain Solomon Gizaw: "Diamond is striving to have a big portion of the African market. They want to go as far as establishing an assembly plant in Africa."

IMAGE: DIAMOND AIRCRAFT

available in many countries and it is expensive. JetA1 is available in every airport," Gizaw said.

"In Ethiopia's situation you can save up to 75 per cent of your fuel cost if you utilise JetA1 instead of avgas. You pay around five dollars for a litre of Avgas while a litre of JetA1 costs only 1.50 USD."

According to Gizaw, the unique feature of the new-generation Diamond Aircraft is that they have the state-of-the-art Garmin 1000 avionics. "They have the latest flight software that makes flying a simple task. These aircraft have ADSB that helps you locate other aircraft near you and avoid a mid-air collision," he said.

"Diamond trainer aircraft have a glass cockpit and the pilot will not be a stranger to a glass cockpit when he moves up to larger aircraft. The new-generation Diamond aircraft are more powerful and they are technologically advanced. They are small aircraft with a big purpose," he added.

Gizaw claims that the safety, reliability and lower operational cost make Diamond the preferred choice for pilot training schools.

He said that Diamond Aircraft Industries is committed to serving Africa adding that the company has forged a strong partnership with Ethiopian Airlines. "Some 16 years ago we flew a Diamond trainer aircraft all the way from Austria to Addis Ababa as a demonstration. Since then, Ethiopian Airlines has imported more than 50 Diamond aircraft - DA40 G type and DA42 G type."



Addis Ababa is a very high elevation airport at 7,626 feet. Gizaw said that the Diamond aircraft have a turbo charger that helps them maintain full power. "At 12,000 feet you don't lose any power as you climb.

"It climbs fast and it has a faster cruise speed. It is worth noting that you are burning only 20 litres of JET A1 per hour as opposed to other similar aircraft which are burning about 42-45 litres of avgas fuel per hour. So you are burning less than 50 per cent of comparable airplanes and paying about 30 per cent of the cost."

Diamond Aircraft Industries has been striving to establish partnerships with flight schools in Africa. According to Gizaw, most African flight schools operate older generation aircraft, purchased with cheap prices. He believes that it is a high time for these schools to replace their ageing trainer aircraft, which are costly to operate as they utilise avgas.

Diamond special mission aircraft are also becoming popular in Africa. The company manufactures DA42 twin engine and the DA62 special mission aircraft. The DA62 is a much larger aircraft with more room for all kinds of gears for surveying and surveillance missions. A number of African countries including Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda are operating Diamond aircraft.

"Diamond is striving to have a big portion of the African market," Gizaw said. "They want to go as far as establishing an assembly plant in Africa. They want to be close to the continent and make the aircraft readily available with a better price. We may see some kind of new developments in a short period of time." ▲

DIAMONDS ARE FOR AFRICA...

The Austria-based light aircraft manufacturer, Diamond Aircraft Industries, is striving to expand its market share in Africa, explains Kaleyesus Bekele.

Founded in 1981, Diamond Aircraft Industries is today among the leading aircraft manufacturers in general aviation. Headquartered in Wiener Neustadt, Austria, with facilities in Canada and China the company has 1,500 employees worldwide.

Today, Diamond offers a range of certified piston aircraft models, from the two-seat single DA20 to the stunning seven seat DA62. With its complete line of piston aircraft including a dedicated flight training concept with single-engine piston (DA40 NG, DA40 XLT) and multi-engine piston (DA42-VI) trainers, the soon to be certified aerobatic turboprop tandem trainer DART along with type-specific flight training simulators and proprietary engines, Diamond Aircraft is the leading provider in the training fleet market.

Diamond Aircraft also made a footprint in the special mission market with the remote-sensing turnkey solutions DA42 MPP and DA62 MPP. Additionally, the company is currently developing the eDA40, an all-electric training aircraft, which will be certified in the near future.

More than 5,500 Diamond aircraft are flown by private pilots, professional flight training operators and institutions worldwide.

Captain Solomon Gizaw, agent for Diamond Aircraft Industries in East Africa, says Diamond Aircraft are made from carbon composite material that makes them much lighter than their contemporaries. Diamond Aircraft has a unique diesel Austro engine which is manufactured by Diamond Aircraft Industries. It is also powered by JetA1.

Abyssinia Flight School, owned by Gizaw operates Diamond trainer aircraft powered by JetA1. "In our case we use JetA1 for safety and quality reasons. Avgas is not

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AIRBUS HELICOPTERS STRENGTHENS AFRICAN FOOTPRINT

Airbus Helicopters is to set up a new subsidiary in Morocco. The upcoming site will develop into an MRO centre with new dedicated facilities and will create a regional hub for West Africa.

This new training centre, equipped with simulators, will train pilots from all over the world.

The project is an important step in the development of Airbus Helicopters in Africa. It is also expected to contribute significantly to the development of the Moroccan aviation industry.

Consequently, the plant will also handle MRO operations on Airbus helicopters currently in service with the Royal Moroccan Air Force, the Royal Navy and the Royal Gendarmerie.

According to Mickael Bertrand, the future CEO and general manager of Airbus Helicopters Morocco, the decision to open the facility is due to Morocco's strategic position and the Kingdom's commitment to invest in the aeronautical sector and unleash its full potential. He also underlined the stable and long-term cooperation with the Moroccan Armed Forces.

The range of helicopters operated in the Kingdom, from the H225 heavy twin-engine to the recent H135, offers huge opportunities to the European manufacturer to expand and create jobs.

This project is another good omen for the aerospace industry which witnessed another landmark agreement involving Boeing, Airbus and Spirit AeroSystems.

The subsidiary will focus on customer service and the



Opportunity knocks: The range of helicopters operated in Morocco, including the H135, offers huge opportunities to Airbus.

IMAGE: AIRBUS HELICOPTERS

repair of Airbus A220 and A350 airframe sections. It will also enable Airbus to have a more balanced approach regarding its operational and financial aviation programmes, and work packages currently performed by Spirit AeroSystems.

The acquisition of Spirit's assets will allow Airbus and Boeing to increase their market presence and consolidate their leading position in the aerospace industry.

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Airbus will also be able to reduce its dependence on third parties and offer safer and more efficient commercial aircraft. Boeing's acquisition of Spirit will include substantially all its commercial and defence operations.

Airbus is pursuing its regional expansion through Airbus Helicopters, Southern Africa, which provides aircraft assembly, completions, maintenance, engineering and training.

There are more than 500 Airbus helicopters currently in service throughout Africa. They are involved in military and civil missions, including air ambulance search and rescue, law enforcement, anti-poaching, infrastructure inspection, corporate missions and tourism.

ANURADHA DEENAPANRAY CHAPPARD

WEALTH AND SAFETY

The north African countries skirting the Mediterranean Sea include some of the wealthiest countries on the continent, but unfortunately all have enemies whether it be the neighbours or terrorists. Alan Warnes looks at some of the recent modernisation efforts they have been through to improve their security.



HERCULEAN: Algeria doesn't tend to buy US anymore, but it still operates around 13 C-130H/H-30s acquired in 1981-84, augmented in 2022 by two second hand LM-100Js purchased by a previous Joint Chief of Staff.

ALGERIA

Arguably the largest spender on military aviation in north Africa and most of it is on Russian hardware.

One of its main priorities is to strengthen the fighter fleet, with the Sukhoi Su-30SME, more Su-35s or even Su-57s, all being considered to replace around 60 MiG-29s and 40 or so Su-24MK/M2/MRK Fencers.

Bolstering the air force's Russian integrated air defence system could see Algeria become the international launch customer of the Su-57 Felon, with a purchase of two squadrons (circa 24 aircraft) looking likely.

The air force is also considering the purchase of Su-30SME super-maneuvrable multi-role fighters.

The type is already operated in Africa by the Ethiopian Air Force and unlike other fighters in the Algerian fleet, works well sharing data and information with military aircraft, ground stations and satellites. There are suggestions that it can even be used as a mini-AWACS.

The Su-35 Flanker, a much improved Su-27 Flanker, is another fighter being considered that has played a big part in Russia's war with Ukraine. Being multi-role with a very capable air defence capability it could be an ideal replacement for the ageing MiG-29s.

All three types could theoretically replace the 100 or so MiG-29s and Su-24s and at the same time boost interoperability.

Spending money with US companies is generally a no-go for Algeria. One recent collaboration with the US involved \$1.1 billion for three intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) configured Gulfstream 650s ordered from Raytheon in 2015 ended in disaster.

Unable to allegedly fulfil the Algerian Air Force requirements, the three Gulfstreams sat stored at Will Rogers in Oklahoma for several years and have recently been sold to a civilian customer.

One would have thought that with such a heavy reliance on Russia, a Russian special mission aircraft could have fitted the bill, but obviously not.

One of the most recent purchases, made by the former Algerian joint chief of staff, General Ahmed Gaid Saleh who also oversaw the failed Gulfstream purchase, and was obviously a supporter of the US, as he secured the purchase of two second-hand civilian Lockheed Martin LM-100J Super Hercules (civilian C-130Js) in 2022. Today the current Algeria commanders prefer not to buy from Uncle Sam.

Algeria became the first international

operator of Turkish Aerospace's Aksungur unmanned combat air system (UCAS) when six were ordered in October 2022, and were presumably delivered sometime in 2023.

EGYPT

The Egyptian Air Force operates a massive and varied fleet of aircraft, and like Algeria most come from Russia. The fighter fleet is made up of a mix of 200+ Lockheed Martin F-16s, 53 Dassault Rafales and 40 MiG-29s.

A \$2 billion contract for 30 Sukhoi Su-35s was signed in 2018 with several seen at Sukhoi's Komsomolsk on Amur facility but deliveries were never made.

In 2019 the US announced it was ready to impose sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanction Act (CAATSA) that would have seen the withdrawal of US security assistance funding valued at over \$1 billion to Egypt.

There had been speculation the EAF was set to sign a multi-billion dollar deal with Leonardo to buy 24 Eurofighters in June 2022.

The contract was said to be worth about \$3 billion as part of a bigger arms deal, valued at between \$10-12 billion, which would have also included 24 M-346 jet trainers.

Continued on Page 34 ▶



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BLOCKBUSTER: The Royal Moroccan Air Force is operating 15 Block 52 F-16C/Ds which have been through upgrades with Lockheed Martin. Deliveries of another 24 brand new Block 72s are expected between 2025-27.

IMAGE: ALAN WARNES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

However, the deal was not signed, and Egypt has since cooled on the purchase.

There is also a requirement to replace the EAF's fleet of K-8Es, which have suffered from a lack of spares for the US Honeywell TFE 731 engine.

State-owned Arab Organisation for Industrialization (AOI), based at Helwan, announced on January 16, 2023 that a deal had been struck with Korean Aerospace Industries for the local production of T-50 lead-in fighter trainer and FA-50 light fighter.

The core of agreement would see KAI set up a deal with AOI for technology transfer and localisation of manufacturing for advanced jet trainers.

MOROCCO

Unlike its neighbour and foe, Algeria, Morocco sticks to US systems which make up much of its integrated air defence system.

France was once a main defence partner, with the purchase of Alphajets and Mirage F1s in the 70/80s, but now it's all US.

Lockheed Martin F-16s makes up the bulk of the fighter fleet, with 16 Block 52s delivered between 2011-12. In August 2020, the US government confirmed that as part of a multi-billion dollar purchase of 90 F-16 Block 72s Morocco would receive 24 (made up of 20 F-16Cs and four dual-seat F-16Ds), with Taiwan receiving the other 66.

Deliveries are expected in 2025, and unlike the previous F-16s these will come with the new Martin Baker US18E ejection seats that are now being installed in the newer Block 70/72s.

Taiwan, Morocco and Jordan are the first to select these new seats over the Collins ACES seat. The new F-16s will come equipped with the

Northrop Grumman APG-83 active electronically scanned array (AESA) radar, Lockheed Martin AN/AAQ-33 sniper pod, Terma AN/ALQ-213 EW management systems and L3Harris AN/ALQ-211 advanced integrated defensive electronic warfare system (AIDEWS) that protects the aircraft from current and evolving threats.

Two older F-16Cs, probably pattern aircraft, went through an upgrade by Lockheed Martin at Fort Worth, Texas, that included the new AN/ALQ-213 AIDEWS in 2019, the rest of the fleet has probably followed suit. The new Block 72s will replace the Mirage F1s that have been retired, and the F-5E/Fs too.

Morocco also ordered 24 Boeing AH-64E Apache attack helicopters in June 2020, delivery was expected to start in 2024 and completed by March 2025.

There has never been a dedicated attack helicopter serving the Moroccan military, which has relied on the armed Gazelle. The new Apaches will be armed with Lockheed Martin AGM-114L/R Hellfire air-to-surface missiles, BAE Systems advanced precision kill weapon system (APKWS) laser-guided rockets and Raytheon AIM-92H Stinger air-to-air missiles.

Boeing announced on November 13 last year, that production of the Apaches had commenced.

Morocco has also purchased two advanced military reconnaissance satellites from Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI). Valued at \$1 billion, the deal announced in mid-August will see Israel's Ofek 13 spy satellites delivered within five years to replace the existing Airbus and Thales space-based surveillance systems. Morocco will use the Ofek 13 to monitor its borders as well as gathering intelligence, with Algeria a priority.

Morocco already relies on a set of two

reconnaissance satellites provided by Astrium France, which can image any point in Algeria every two hours.

This provides the Royal Moroccan Air Force a huge targeting tool which can't be challenged by the Algerians, that means they can spy and designate a target in their neighbour's territory at ease – a tool much more powerful than putting an expensive radar with limited side views on a Gulfstream.

The RMAF currently has two ISR Gulfstream 550 intelligence surveillance reconnaissance aircraft on order with L3 Systems, fitted with Israeli Elta systems. Both aircraft are being upgraded at L3's Greenville, Texas facility.

LIBYA

The Libyan government has no funding to buy new aircraft and relies on donations from other countries, and the inventories of both the GNA (Government of National Accord) and LNA (Libyan National Army) that fought each other in the recent civil war (2014-2020).

TUNISIA

The most recent procurement by the Tunisian Air Force has been eight Textron T-6C training aircraft to replace the Aero L-59s. The \$91 million deal signed in July 2022, led to the first four aircraft delivered to Sfax air base in May 2023 with deliveries completed in August 2023.

The DSCA notified US Congress of the proposed sale of the attack version, known as the AT-6 Wolverine, but this has not progressed.

Four Grand Caravan EX single-engine turboprops are also being acquired from Textron, equipped with electro-optical/infrared sensors, for the ISR missions. The first pair were delivered in late July 2024, it's unclear when the final pair will arrive. ▲



Aero Vodochody heads to African markets with new L-39NG aircraft

Aero Vodochody has completed the development of the new L-39NG trainer aircraft, which replaces the world-famous and widely used predecessor L-39 Albatros. Following the successful delivery of the first six Aero L-39NG aircraft to its first customer, the Vietnamese Air Force, and the upcoming delivery of the first units to LOM PRAHA, a domestic company training pilots for the Czech Army, Aero is now focusing on the African market. The company has already announced this by actively participating in the prestigious Egypt Airshow in September, where it presented its new Aero L-39NG aircraft to a wide international audience, and especially to potential African customers.



„We are in talks with many interested customers, primarily with users of the L-39 fleet. Africa has always been served very well by Aero platforms and we believe that the L-39NG will be a key platform for the next 40 years on the continent, as it meets all the training and operational requirements of African users, the aircraft is very safe and reliable and its acquisition and operational costs are very low, compared to other jet platforms. The L-39NG truly is the smartest option for African customers,“ said **Filip Kulstrunk, executive vice president of Aero Vodochody.**

Aero Vodochody offers solutions tailored to the specific operational and environmental needs of African countries, including

avionics customisation and munitions compatibility. The L-39NG is an ITAR (International Traffic in Arms Regulations) unencumbered aircraft, allowing for unrestricted global operations and a simplified aircraft procurement process. The aircraft also supports both Eastern and Western weapon systems, facilitating the transition from Eastern to Western weapons.

Filip Kulstrunk emphasizes that the L-39NG perfectly meets the requirements for a modern and cost-effective trainer aircraft. The L-39NG platform enables the transition to modern fourth and fifth generation fighters such as the F-16, MiG-29 or Rafale. The L-39NG offers a cutting-edge hybrid training solution that reduces overall training time and cost. The L-39NG stands out for its combination of advanced technology, cost efficiency and operational versatility. Aero Vodochody is ready to support users locally and to initiate industrial cooperation discussions in African countries where requested by the customer and where relevant.

The L-39NG fulfils several key roles. Primarily serving as an advanced trainer, it is also capable of light combat roles against ground and air targets, including direct air support. With its flexibility and ability to carry a variety of weapon systems, including guided and unguided bombs,

missiles and machine guns, the L-39NG is able to respond effectively to a wide range of operational needs. In addition, the aircraft is capable of operating for up to four hours, making it ideal for ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) missions such as border and coastal patrols.

The L-39NG, the modern successor to the legendary L-39 Albatros, is an ideal solution for African countries to modernise their training programmes. With its versatility and cost-effectiveness, the L-39NG has quickly become an attractive option for countries seeking modern trainer aircraft. The L-39NG is the only advanced trainer that can offer both Western and Eastern avionics platforms, allowing for easy transition between these systems.

AERO Vodochody AEROSPACE sees a significant opportunity on the African continent to further develop and strengthen cooperation in this area, where it has historical experience and long-term cooperation. In doing so, the L-39NG is a key product that combines modern technology with historically proven reliability to offer unique value to its users.



RAISING THE STANDARD: The C-130H was handed over to Botswana to restore some of the airlift capability it had lost with the retirement of older versions of the Hercules.



Botswana and Kenya get a lift

Two African nations have received useful boosts to their air arms following donations of surplus equipment by the US.

Alan Dron
reports.

The US has enhanced the transport capabilities of Kenya and Botswana with the handing over of aircraft to the two nations. Kenya is to receive 16 transport and scout helicopters, while Botswana has taken delivery of a Lockheed Martin C-130H transport.

Following Kenya president William Ruto's state visit to the US in May, it was announced that the US would supply eight Bell UH-1 Huey transport helicopters and eight MD Helicopters MD500s from surplus stocks.

The first two UH-1s were delivered in July and, at the time of writing, were being prepared for service in Nairobi by a team of US Air Force technicians, Kenya Air Force (KAF) personnel and representatives from Bell. The remaining six aircraft are scheduled to be delivered by the end of August. The MD500s will be delivered in early 2025.

Although both types are elderly, they will constitute useful additions to Kenya's helicopter fleet, which makes up by far the largest components of both the KAF and Kenya Army Aviation (KAA).

The KAF's rotary-wing transport force currently consists of 10 Aerospatiale SA330 Pumas, seven UH-1H Huey IIs, three AgustaWestland AW139s, and a single Russian machine, a Mil Mi-171E.

Three Bell AH-1F Cobras, previously operated by Jordan, are the force's only dedicated attack aircraft, although eight Airbus Helicopters H125M Fenecs can also be fitted to carry weapons.

KAA, meanwhile, has a substantial fleet of 33 MD500M/MD Scout Defenders plus six MD530F Cayuse Warrior light attack machines that can carry cannon and rocket pods.

The US has also said that it intends to upgrade Manda Bay airfield in northern Kenya, including the construction of a 10,000-foot runway.

Additionally, US President Biden intends to designate Kenya as a 'Major Non-NATO Ally', in recognition of Kenya's close working relationship with the US military and defence civilians. It will be the first time that the US has given a sub-Saharan African nation this status.

Kenya's main external threat comes in the form of Somalia-based Al-Shabaab Islamic militants over its

northern border. The militants have raided Kenya's northern provinces on several occasions in recent years, attacking military bases and killing or kidnapping civilians.

Kenya also contributes to several United Nations and African Union peacekeeping forces on the continent, providing another task for the country's rotary-wing forces.

Meanwhile, the US has handed over a Lockheed Martin C-130H to the Botswana Defence Force (BDF).

"This C-130H couldn't have come at a better time than at this moment," said Thomas Kagiso Mmusi, Botswana's minister of defence and security, at the handover ceremony in June.

"Just a year ago, the last of the C-130Bs, which have served us fabulously for a quarter of a century, was grounded. The BDF has diligently performed a variety of mission sets using these aircraft over the years. These include airlift to support UN mission in Sudan, African Union missions and special forces exercises with international forces," Mmusi said.

□□□□□

"In this symbolic transfer of the C-130H aircraft, we reaffirm our shared commitment to security and stability in the region," said US ambassador Howard Van Vranken.

The aircraft will restore to the BDF enhanced airlift capabilities, allowing more effective responses to national and regional challenges, including the provision of humanitarian aid after natural disasters, peacekeeping operations, and logistical support.

Until the C-130H's arrival, the BDF's largest aircraft had been two CASA CN235 light transports. The C-130H can carry more than three times the load of the CN235s, with roughly 25 per cent greater range.

Botswana's acquisition of the aircraft follows its successful operation of three C-130B aircraft acquired from the United States in the 1990s. These aircraft played pivotal roles in delivering humanitarian aid and supporting the Southern Africa Development Community's mission in Mozambique, flown and maintained by the Botswana Defence Force for 30 years until 2023, when they were retired from service. ▲

C-390 MILLENNIUM

UNBEATABLE COMBINATION

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Hungary has become the second NATO country, after Portugal, to welcome the C-390 Millennium. The aircraft is the first in the world to be equipped with a roll-on/roll-off intensive care unit, making it ideally suited for humanitarian and medical evacuation missions. Other capabilities include search & rescue, cargo and troops transport, precision cargo airdrops, paratrooper operations and air-to-air refuelling. A growing number of countries in Europe are choosing the C-390 Millennium (including the Netherlands, Austria and Czech Republic) attracted by its unbeatable combination of technology, speed, performance and multi-mission features. This latest entry into service is another milestone for an incredible aircraft that has already achieved 14,000 flight hours with the Brazilian and Portuguese air forces.

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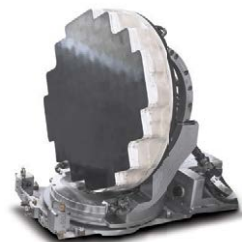
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A new era takes flight – how Ghana is rising through the ranks as a West African aviation hotspot.

Chloë Greenbank talks with Yvonne Nana Afriyie Opare, managing director, GACL.

IT'S GHANA BE EXCITING!

To keep up with passenger growth and position itself as a key aviation hub in West Africa, Ghana Airports Company Ltd (GACL) has undertaken several initiatives to develop its airport sector.

Managing and overseeing all airports and aerodromes in Ghana, GACL is focused on sustainable growth, building new facilities, increasing existing capacity and adopting modern technology to enhance the overall passenger experience.

Yvonne Nana Afriyie Opare, appointed managing director of GACL in December 2023, told *African Aerospace* that the first half of 2024 has already seen some exciting developments for Ghana's airports.

"In June, we welcomed ITA Airways, as the 24th international operator at Kotoka International Airport. The Italian carrier currently serves four weekly flights between Accra and Rome.

"Additionally, Ethiopian Airlines has been granted fifth freedom rights by Ghana's Civil Aviation Authority to fly from Accra to Toronto in Canada.

"Due to start in the first quarter of 2025, this will be the first direct link between the two countries. We also operationalised Prempeh I International Airport in Kumasi on 1 July, having completed a new terminal building, apron, taxi links and fire station at a cost of €125 million."

With a passenger throughput of 800,000 per year, plans are now under way to extend Kumasi's runway from 1,891m to 2,320m in length by the end of this year.

"We currently have two domestic carriers serving the airport: PassionAir and Africa World Airlines. However, we are in discussion with various other carriers to operate out of Kumasi which we hope to announce later this year in line with our runway extension and the airport's certification as an international hub," continued Opare.

She also noted that elsewhere in GACL's portfolio, Tamale International Airport opened its new terminal in 2023 with the capacity to serve 400,000 passengers per year.

Driven by increasing passenger confidence, political stability and a flight time of around six hours from most European destinations, GACL is seeing steady growth in passenger traffic across its network.

In 2023, Ghana's airports welcomed 3.95 million passengers, surpassing pre-Covid (2019) passenger traffic of 3.19 million.

Meanwhile, the number of passenger aircraft movements was 43,858 in 2023, a slight decrease from 2019's

▼ About 85 per cent of GACL's revenue currently comes from aeronautical activities and the aim is to balance this more evenly with non-aeronautical revenue streams. ▲
YVONNE NANA AFRIYIE OPARE

46,996 movements, which Opare attributes primarily to, "an increase in the use of larger aircraft with greater passenger capacity."

To enhance its passenger experience, GACL is also embracing biometric technology and is working with SITA to deploy e-gates at Kotoka before the end of the year.

"We are already working with Ghana's immigration services using biometrics to monitor passengers entering the country and once we've installed e-gates for departing passengers at Kotoka, we plan to implement this technology at our other international hubs too," noted Opare.



Moreover, GACL has ambitious plans to develop its second airport city in Accra to complement its existing aerotropolis.

"In line with plans to diversify and grow revenue opportunities, Airport City 2 will cover 100 acres with amenities including a sports complex and amphitheatre, as well as hotels, restaurants and office space. About 85 per cent of GACL's revenue currently comes from aeronautical activities and the aim is to balance this more evenly with non-aeronautical revenue streams, for which Airport City 2 will play an integral role."

It has certainly been a busy first six months in office for Opare, whose extensive background as a leader in the commercial real estate sector, brings a fresh perspective to overseeing GACL's operations, as well as the development of non-aeronautical revenue opportunities.

While she credits her team of "highly-professional airport leaders" with helping her run operations, Opare also describes herself as a "hands-on" leader. She is currently enrolled on the International Airport Professional (IAP) programme and is hoping to receive IAP accreditation next year.

As for being a female leader in a traditionally male-dominated industry, Opare said gender should never be an issue, as she underlined her advice to young people coming into the sector: "You must be persistent, consistent and never give up. Never stop at 'no'; let it be a challenge you turn into an opportunity!" ▲



Yvonne Nana Afriyie Opare: GACL is embracing biometric technology and is working with SITA to deploy e-gates at Kotoka airport. IMAGES: GACL

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AWAKENING AWARENESS OF OPPORTUNITIES IN WEST AFRICA



Bankole Bernard: "This aspect of the industry that relates to training has not been given enough advocacy and awareness."

IMAGE: TEMILADE ADU

The chairman of the Association of Aviation Training Organisations (AATOs) in Nigeria, Bankole Bernard, has said that "until we start to create the kind of awareness that will reposition the ATOs in West Africa, it is not something that will be done."

Bernard, who is also managing director of Lagos Aviation Academy (LAA) said in an exclusive interview with *African Aerospace* magazine that "this aspect of the industry that relates to training has not been given enough advocacy and awareness" stressing the need to "make the youth realise that there are other opportunities they can embrace other than everybody saying they want to go to the university."

"If you go to the university, you may not get a job, but if you come to the aviation training school, you can easily get a job. You can easily become a product that can be exported outside the shores of the country. So, to the best of my knowledge, I think a lot still has to be done about creating awareness of the ATOs," said Bernard. "The government just needs to create awareness in terms of letting the young populace in the country know that there are a lot of opportunities."

"When you speak to a lot of people about ATOs, or aviation training schools, what comes to mind is about training to be a pilot. But that is just one out of many courses."

"We have engineers, flight dispatchers, cabin crew. We have reclassification tests, and so on. They are so many, but it looks so little, because little awareness has been done in the industry," he explained.



Bernard said the absence of awareness has affected collaboration among ATOs in West Africa, stating that "they can only collaborate where there is enough awareness."

"Before you can start to collaborate, you have to first say, here we are. If you don't say, here I am, nobody will say there you are. Here we are, as ATOs in Nigeria. Here we are as ATOs in West Africa."

"Then, we can start to collaborate. The question is, how many people are even aware that these ATOs exist?" Bernard concluded. ▲



ETHIOPIAN'S UNIVERSITY IN A CLASS OF ITS OWN

The Ethiopian Aviation University was established as a small aviation training centre in 1956 in the premise of the headquarters of Ethiopian Airlines in Addis Ababa.

The aviation training centre has been training the pilots, technicians, cabin crew and airline sales agents required for the operation of Ethiopian Airlines. The centre has played a crucial role in the success of the national airline by providing well-trained staff.

Almost all the senior executives of the airline, including former CEO Girma Wake, Tewolde Gebremariam and the current CEO, Mesfin Tasew, have been trained at this once small aviation training centre.

With a humble beginning in the 1950s with few instructors, the aviation training centre expanded and grew steadily over the consecutive decades.

When Ethiopian Airlines transformed into an aviation group and unveiled its ambitious



TOP CLASS: The pilot training school, and (above) Kassie Yimam, acting president of the Ethiopian Aviation University and Mesfin Tasew, Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO, awarding outstanding graduates.

IMAGES: ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES

Vision2025 growth strategy, the airline made a whopping more than 100 million USD investment in the centre to elevate it into a fully-fledged aviation academy.

The fast-growing national airline demand for aviation professionals increased drastically. To meet the growing requirement the airline invested heavily in acquiring dozens of trainer aircraft, flight simulators, and cabin crew

training mock aircraft, plus built facilities such as class rooms, dormitories, a dining hall, auditorium and library.

Five modern buildings comprising various facilities were built and the aviation academy became one of the eight profit centres of Ethiopian Airlines Aviation Group.

"Human resource development was one of the five pillars of our Vision 2025 growth strategy," Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO Mesfin Tasew said.

"Human resources has always been our priority agenda even when we were a small airline," he added.

To cope up with the fast growth of the airline and to meet the future development goals the aviation academy had to grow proportionally. Accordingly, the aviation academy was transformed into a full-fledged aviation university in 2023.

The Ethiopian Aviation University now has a pilot training school, aircraft maintenance technicians school, cabin crew training school, commercial and ground services training school, leadership and career development training school, school of aerospace engineering, and a school of travel, tourism and hospitality. ▲

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As lack of investment in MRO forces African airlines to ground aircraft, there are encouraging signs in North Africa of ways around the impasse. **Chuck Grieve** investigates.

Workshops on the road to repair



Leap year: Sanad opened the first certified LEAP engine MRO centre in the SAMENA region in November 2023.
 IMAGE: SANAD

Africa finds itself chronically subject to trends that are causing problems for the aviation sector in general and MRO in particular. Oliver Wyman's recent Global Fleet and MRO Market Forecast said recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic remained stubbornly slow; in 2020 alone, Africa's aviation sector lost \$7.7bn in revenue.

Other challenges included inflation, shortages of raw materials, and shortages of skilled labour, including maintenance technicians and engineers. The industry must modernise and optimise production along the supply chain, while the MRO support network faces similar challenges in keeping aircraft operational.

"While the industry must invest in overcoming those challenges, it's important to remember that it's not easy for it to do so at present, according to several trends," said André Martins, partner and head of transportation and services for India, Middle East, and Africa regions (IMEA) at Oliver Wyman.

Captain Ado Sanusi, managing director of Nigeria's Aero Contractors, told *This Day* newspaper that airlines were "dropping aircraft" rather than booking them in for mandatory checks, while other aircraft remained out of service over unpaid bills. He blamed the economic situation in Nigeria and the scarcity of dollars for a situation where operators chose to ground aircraft that are due for checks. Meanwhile, aircraft also remain stranded in Europe and Turkey, waiting for their maintenance bills to be paid.

The result, said Sanusi, is cancelled flights and under-used airports, a situation that was only going to get worse as demand rose.

His company, he said, was expanding its MRO capabilities with enough hangar space to conduct two C-checks at the same time, and was in talks with Honeywell on opening an APU overhaul workshop.

Amos Akpan, managing director of Flight and Logistics

Solutions, said the situation was sufficiently dire that "consultants are asking would-be investors in scheduled airline operations to hold on as they watch situations in the industry."

A glimmer of good news comes from Sanad, the Abu Dhabi-based engine MRO specialist. Chief executive Mansoor Janahi told *African Aerospace* that one of the company's "strategic goals" was to expand outside the UAE, and that Africa – "massively underserved and growing" – was one of its target regions, alongside India and Southeast Asia.

"We look at our partners – all the major engine OEMs and 30 different airlines," said Janahi. "We have the industrial and technical knowledge, networks of partners and customers, and we

want to be in growing markets."

At this year's Farnborough Airshow, Sanad added to its impressive list of partners when it announced a deal with Airbus to provide MRO services for engines powering the European OEM's narrowbody and widebody models.



Sanad had identified EgyptAir Maintenance and Engineering (M&E) as a potential partner before signing an MoU at the 2023 Dubai Airshow to provide flat-rate component repair services. "Partnering with EgyptAir M&E ought to help us expand our capacity," said Janahi. The arrangement was "like plug and play", he added. "Some of the capabilities they have mirror what we do here in Abu Dhabi."

Both companies saw the deal as aligning with their home countries' national economic strategies of expansion and diversification. For EgyptAir M&E, partnering with Sanad was an opportunity to exploit capabilities profitably, gain customer confidence, expand within Africa and the Middle East, support sister countries and achieve integrated cooperation with partners.

A statement on Sanad's website said: "This strategic partnership is set to offer enhanced engine testing and MRO services, including the convenience of in-house engine part repairs in Cairo and Abu Dhabi. This innovative alliance is well-positioned to significantly expand Sanad and EgyptAir M&E's customer base, bringing them closer to their customers in Africa and the Middle East."

Both companies, it added, were "committed to pooling their substantial expertise and resources."

When contacted in July, neither company had anything to say about progress on the initiative, with an EgyptAir M&E spokesperson saying only that negotiations continued. ▲

Egypt was the scene for the world's newest airshow, which attracted respectable numbers of exhibitors and visitors. Its organisers hope it will become a regular Middle East fixture alongside the Dubai and Bahrain events. **Alan Dron** reports.

Airshow puts Egypt on the world stage

A small, but well-packed exhibition hall, interesting static and flying displays, together with 15,000 visitors, were among the highlights of the first Egypt International Airshow.

Held at El Alamein International Airport, around 250km west of Cairo, the airshow's site is a small, but modern, regional airport that is already being expanded as the gateway to the fast-growing city of El Alamein, which Egypt aims to become the country's next major holiday destination.

At present, the airport has only a small number of daily scheduled and executive flights. This meant that there was plenty of space on the apron for show exhibitors to bring in their aircraft.

Perhaps noting the success of the UAE and – increasingly – Saudi Arabia in using aerospace as a driver for their wider economies, the Egyptian organisers were keen to show their country's skills in the sector.

If all goes well, there are plans to make the event a biennial affair, alternating with Dubai International Airshow years. The only problem may be that, at present, the Egyptian show falls within three months of the existing Bahrain International Airshow.

The importance of the show to Egypt was marked by a visit on the first day by Egyptian president Abdel Fatah El-Sisi, who spent several hours touring the exhibition hall and aircraft.

The show was strongly biased towards military exhibits, both on the ramp and in the

exhibition hall, with Russian, Chinese, Turkish and local Egyptian companies all making a strong showing among the 200-plus exhibitors.

The Egyptian Ministry of Defence and Egyptian Air Force were prominent in the show's organisation, together with the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the Egyptian Space Agency, and EgyptAir.

Given the degree of local defence involvement, it was unsurprising to see a range of Egyptian Air Force aircraft on the ramp, including a Mig-29SMT, Lockheed Martin F-16, Lockheed Martin C-130H, Dassault Rafale DM and Mirage 2000EM, plus a Mil Mi-172 VIP helicopter and several executive jets.

The C-130 family accounted for the only military order announced during the show, with Egypt signing a deal for two C-130Js. As the country's air force starts to replace its elderly C-130Hs, more orders are expected.

Qatar and the UAE were also prominent on the static display, with the Qatar Emiri Air Force sending several aircraft to the show, including a Boeing C-17 Globemaster III strategic transport in a Qatar Airways colour scheme, a Eurofighter Typhoon, an Airbus Helicopters NH-90 and Boeing AH-64E Apache attack helicopter.

Russia's Rosoboronexport and China's CATIC occupied major stands in the exhibition hall. China also showed off its Bayi aerobatic team with their J-10 fighters and there were reports in several local publications – as yet unconfirmed – that Egypt had signed a major

order for J-10Cs to replace at least part of its 200-strong fleet of F-16s, which are some of the oldest still in frontline service globally.

Other military aircraft manufacturers were also present, hoping to make deals. The Czech company Aero Vodochody showed its L-39NG advanced trainer, which has recently won its first export order from Vietnam.

Aero also has ambitions in Africa: "We are returning to the African continent, where Aero has a great tradition, because we believe the L-39NG has great potential here," said the company's chairman and president, Viktor Sotona.

Sotona stressed the aircraft's versatility in multiple roles, including training, light attack and ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance), together with its ability to accept either Western or Eastern avionics. "In addition, we have long experience in manufacturing and assembling aircraft in Africa. We are also considering establishing an MRO centre there."

There were two international debuts. China's Xian Y-20 heavy transport made its first overseas show appearance, while Turkey's TAI Hürjet supersonic advanced jet trainer appeared at its first international show. Several Turkish companies, such as defence electronics manufacturer Aselsan, also took space in the exhibition.

Egyptian manufacturers were naturally prominent, with UAS manufacturer Robotic Engineering System displaying three main types.

The E-June 30 and Ahmous were both

optimised for the ISR role, with the former powered by two petrol engines and capable of staying aloft for 14 hours in the medium-altitude, long-endurance (MALE) category. It has been in Egyptian air force service for four to five years, while the latter is scheduled to start flight testing in 2025.

The third aircraft was the ambitious-looking 6th October model, which is due to fly for the first time next year. The version on display had a remarkable 16 underwing hard points, capable of carrying a payload of up to 1,000kg. According to a source at the show, it is essentially an upgrade of the E-June 30, will have a maximum take-off weight of 2.5 tonnes and be capable of flights of up to 30 hours.

Significantly, the show described itself as 'The gateway to aerospace in Africa and the Middle East.' Egypt, with one of Africa's largest economies, is particularly interested in

expanding its 'reach' on the continent and "The event aims to accelerate industrialisation, digitalisation, and globalisation in the defence, space, and commercial aviation sectors in Africa and the Middle East," according to the organisers.

Despite one problem on the second day, when the gates remained closed for almost three hours after the scheduled opening time, apparently for 'security processes and essential maintenance', according to the organisers.

Overall, the general impression was of a well-run show, with good facilities and an interesting line-up of hardware – arguably better than this year's much larger Farnborough Airshow in the UK.

Will it become part of the regular airshow circuit? The Egyptian authorities' intention at this point is for it to do so, with the next event scheduled for 2026. Let's wait and see.

IMAGES: BILLYPIX



The Xi'an Y-20 Kungpeng is a large military transport aircraft.



Turkey's TAI Hürjet supersonic advanced jet trainer appeared at its first international show.



Aero Vodochody showed its L-39NG advanced trainer.



Egyptian Air Force Silver Stars perform during the airshow.

The biennial African Aerospace and Defence Expo has evolved from being primarily an aerospace expo to being a defence show. For 2024 the shift in focus was heightened by poor weather that limited the airshow at Guateng, South Africa, as well as the absence of former key exhibitors.

Guy Leitch takes a closer look.

CHINA SHINES THROUGH THE CLOUDS



Crowd pleaser: The mini war on the trade days blew dust and debris into the chalets.
IMAGE: GUY LEITCH



GETTING A GRIP: One of just three flying SAAF Gripens.
IMAGE: GUY LEITCH

The lacklustre aviation participation in AAD was most evident with the non-attendance of the United States and Russia.

The USA withdrew at the last minute, citing delays in the issuing of approvals by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) for their aircraft. However, the SANDF disputes this.

In previous AAD Expos the USA has been a huge presence with Boeing C17 Globemasters, Boeing KC135R Stratotankers, Lockheed Martin C130J Super Hercules, the General Atomics MQ-9 Reaper UAV and even a live band playing Dixie tunes on the flightline.

China and Brazil are partners with South Africa in the BRICS alliance and the absence of the Americans left the door wide open for China and Brazil to exhibit their military strategic airlifters.

The South African Air Force (SAAF) has a long-frustrated need to replace their 60-year-old C-130BZ Hercules fleet with modern airlifters. In 2009 South Africa cancelled its orders for the Airbus A400M, which left it with no replacement for the C-130s, which were supposed to fly until 2020.

Visitors arriving at AAD were greeted by the sight of four cannibalised C-130 airframes standing forlorn behind the hangars. The need for the SAAF to replace the C-130s is therefore evident and so the Brazilians brought an Embraer C-390 Millennium and the Chinese brought a Xi'an Y-20 Kunpeng, which was parked next to



TOP PERFORMER: The Chinese PLAAF brought a Z-10 helicopter in the Y-20's hold.

the C-390 and showed up the Brazilian's smaller size.

While the C-390 was only on static display, China's Y-20 was a notable airshow performer on the trade and public days, particularly in Saturday's marginal weather, when it disappeared into the cloud base and had to break away for a return on the ILS.

China had by far the biggest presence at the Expo, exhibiting a wide range of weapons, missiles, drones, aircraft models and small arms. Another notable exhibit was the Changhe Z-

10ME attack helicopter. This arrived in the hold of the Y-20, emphasising the airlifter's capability to transport attack helicopters with the rotor masthead intact.

■ THE EXHIBITION

Overall, the Expo reflected a steady decline in support by exhibitors. While there was the usual large presence of senior military officers and consulate employees on the trade days, there was a sense of visitors wanting to see how technology was evolving, rather than being actual buyers. This was underlined

by comments by both South Africa's president Ramaphosa and minister of defence, Motshekga.

The decline in the expo was evident in the inability of the organisers to sell out the exhibition space. They reported 80 per cent of the stands sold, however that number may be on the inflated side as the Expo seemed smaller than previous years, when all the hangars were filled with exhibitors.

This year there were some eerily empty hangars and show stands where exhibitors just failed to arrive. Apart from the non-appearance of the USA, there were also notable absences from Russia and the Ukraine.

Despite the AAD organisers' best efforts, the bifurcation between the military side of the show and general aviation has grown even bigger. This year general aviation occupied just a small fenced-off area on the apron – which was noteworthy for its few exhibitors, some of which were drone operators. It would seem that the annual Aero Expo that takes place at nearby Wonderboom Airport is proving a viable alternative to the defence-heavy AAD.

This year the Expo was again marked by the absence of Boeing. Airbus had a chalet, but was focussed mainly on its helicopters – perhaps indicative of how small the two major manufacturers consider the possibility of a new airliner order from SAA – or any of the other local airlines.

There were just 10 country exhibitors, of

which notable ones were China, India and Turkey. While the Russian government was conspicuous by its absence, Rosoboron, the Russian defence export and import agency, had a strong presence.

Perhaps indicative of a much needed turnaround, South African state-owned arms manufacturer Denel featured strongly. The other large presence were private arms manufacturers Paramount and Milkor, which featured its very well received Milko 380 UAV.

Missiles and rockets were prominent, particularly from Turkish manufacturer Rocketsan – but the dominant presence was UAV technology. Denel used the Expo to publicly launch its RW-UASD rotary wing UAV. In support of the launch, a fun exhibit was an intricate full-sized replica of the UAV handcrafted from beads.

Paramount again featured the Mwari single engine reconnaissance surveillance and precision strike aircraft, which it controversially took over from original developer Aerosud. This year the Mwari put on an impressive flying display that showed off its speed, power and agility. Sales however remain elusive with some of the few Mwaris in operation seeing action in Northern Mozambique.

■ THE AIR SHOW

The Expo covers three days followed by an airshow for the public. Unfortunately the weather for the first public day was poor and this probably deterred many spectators. On Saturday a low cloud base prevented all but the most determined Waterkloof-based helicopter displays, and the teams that had to come in from other airports were stood down early.

There were two welcome new displays at the airshow: the former US Navy North American T-2 Buckeye trainer which was returned to airworthiness at its base at the Chinese AVIC flight school in the remote town of Oudtshoorn, and a former SAAF Atlas Impala trainer, now privately owned. A regular at AAD is the Zimbabwean Hongdu JL-8 (Nanchang JL-8) trainer which looked somewhat tatty on static display.

After the negotiation of a last minute compromise for the maintenance contracts for its

SAAB Gripen fighters in 2022, the SAAF managed to get three Gripens flying. The SAAF's 85 Combat Flying School in Makhado brought a very impressive six-ship BAE Hawk Mk 120 display team including the Hawk painted in the colours of the South African flag. The SAAF fielded a limited two plus one Silver Falcons Pilatus PC-7 MkII formation aerobatics team.

The SAAF did themselves proud with show-stopping pyro-technical anti-missile flare displays from the Denel Rooivalk. These dramatic flares are a great favourite with the photographers and commentator Brian Emmenis was able to give them excellent forewarning.

Helicopter action was provided by a MBB/Kawasaki BK117 which was flown with verve, showing what this rigid rotor design is capable of. The SAAF Museum also came to the party with a variety of helicopters performing an aerial ballet which enthralled the cognoscenti.



The big crowd pleaser is the 'mini-war' with many explosions, smoke and simulated machine gun fire. A tactical war-game operation using several multi-disciplinary teams was put through their paces. Unfortunately the prevailing wind is from the west and this means that the dust and ash from the mini war blows into the exhibitors' chalets.

Another crowd pleaser is the old trick of hoisting an 'illegally parked' car with a SAAF Atlas Oryx and then 'accidentally' dropping it midfield. This was carefully rehearsed with an actor who claimed the car was his and was deemed one of the best ever of these stunts.

The ex-Swiss Air Force Hawker Hunter T.68 owned and flown by Ron Wheeldon was a rare treat. A highlight for the crowd was a finale flown by a FlySafair Boeing 737-800 in formation with the four 85 CFS Hawks.

The airshow ended with not one, but three climaxes: First the four Harvards of the Flying Lions flew a beautiful sunset display, this was followed by a Rooivalk dropping flares into the gloaming and finally the SAAF pulled out all the stops to field a nine-ship jet fly-past featuring three Gripens and six Hawks flying the Red Arrows diamond-nine formation. ▲

▲ ALL IN A DAY

Filip Kulštrunk

Marcelle Nethersole speaks to the Executive Vice President, of Aero Vodochody Aerospace.

Can you tell me about Aero Vodochody Aerospace?

Aero Vodochody focuses on the development, production, maintenance and modernisation of military and civil aircraft. It is the largest aircraft manufacturer in the Czech Republic and one of the oldest in the world.

In the field of its own aircraft, Aero is a permanent partner of a number of military air forces and has a strong position in the market of military training and light combat aircraft.

With 11,000 aircraft produced in its 100 years of existence, hundreds of L-39 Albatros aircraft still in service with dozens of military operators, a number of demonstration teams, and especially the new L-39NG aircraft, Aero has established itself as a leader in the global jet trainer market.

Aero also works with major aircraft manufacturers such as Airbus and Embraer on a number of projects and is responsible not only for the manufacture and assembly of aircraft units, but also for their development.

How much of your time is spent promoting L-39NG?

The L-39NG is the primary focus of our marketing activities. It is a brand new jet, which might look similar to the legacy L-39, but it is in many ways a significant improvement.

So we have to show it to the world in any and every way possible. Whether it is through presentations, hosting events, attending trade shows or welcoming delegations to Aero, we use all available channels to connect with our potential customers and present the L-39NG.

Do you still market L-39 MRO?

MRO of our L-39, L-159 and now L-39NG aircraft is an integral part of Aero's strategy. L-39 MRO is getting increasingly difficult as the supply of spares is difficult and maintenance of some of the aggregates is no longer possible.

We continue to do our best, as the OEM, to serve our L-39 users, however we actively encourage them to make the transition to L-39NG in the near future.

“Africa has always been served very well by Aero platforms and we believe that the L-39NG will be a key platform for the next 40 years.”

What projects do you do in Africa and have you plans to further expand?

We are in talks with many interested customers, primarily with users of the L-39 fleet.

Africa has always been served very well by Aero platforms and we believe that the L-39NG will be a key platform for the next 40 years on the continent, as it meets all the training and operational requirements of African users, the aircraft is very safe and reliable and its acquisition and operational costs are very low, compared to other jet platforms. The L-39NG truly is the smartest option for African customers.

What other revenue lines does Aero have?

Aero focuses on three core business pillars. In addition to producing our unique aircraft under the Aero L-39NG brand, we continue to place orders for MRO of our aircraft and production of aerostructures for our customers.

Aero Vodochody has had a breakthrough period. We have successfully delivered the first six Aero L-39NG jet aircraft to our first customer, the Vietnamese Air Force.

In September, we will also deliver the first aircraft to the state-owned company LOM PRAHA, which provides training for the Czech Air Force. We consider this to be a very significant event and a reference for other existing and potential customers with whom we are negotiating.

What does a typical day involve for you in your role?

I travel probably around 50 per cent of my time, primarily meeting our customers, users and partners. I always try to gather their feedback, listen to their needs and challenges that they face, in order to create the right solution – whether it is in the area of training their pilots or performing operational missions.

The rest of my time, I spend with responsibilities related to my role as executive vice president of Aero, mostly on reviewing company performance, strategic planning and managing my team.



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