

# ARABIAN AEROSPACE

ISSUE 3, VOLUME 17:  
AUGUST – OCTOBER  
2025

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THE MAGAZINE FOR AEROSPACE PROFESSIONALS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA AND TURKEY

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UPSCALE  
EGYPTAIR

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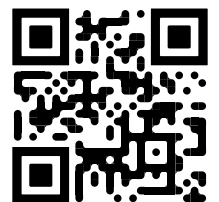
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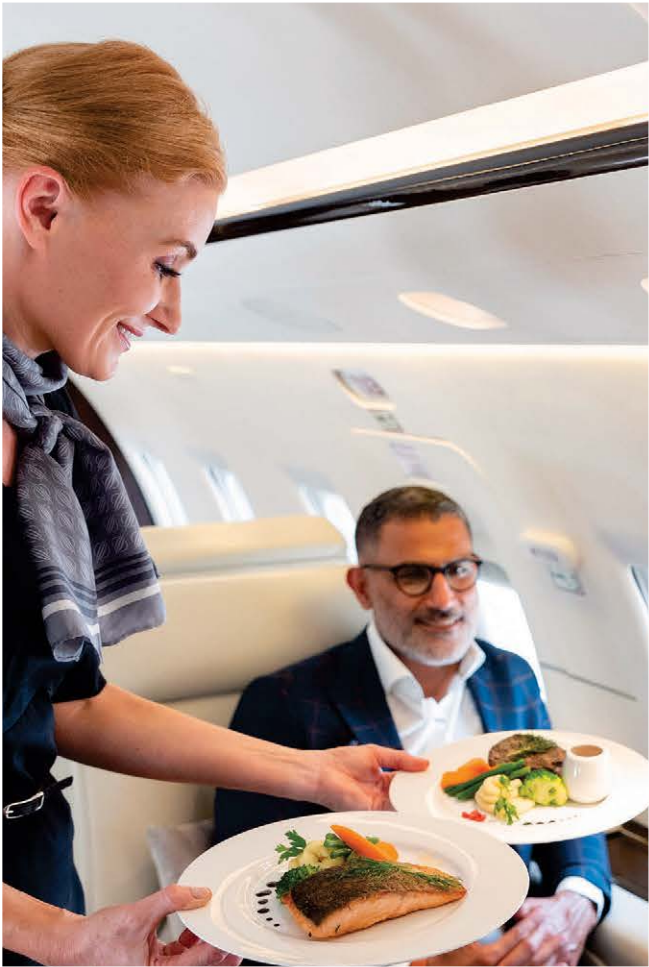
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Captain Ahmed Adel,  
chairman and CEO of  
EgyptAir..  
IMAGE: DUBAI AIRPORTS

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## THE RISE AND SOMETIMES FALL OF LCCS

**T**he arrival, exit and growth dynamism of low-cost carriers has long been a hot topic in the region. The latest headline sees a LCC casualty in the UAE. Large European LCC Wizz Air announced in mid-July that it will close its Abu Dhabi-based joint venture airline in September, saying “supply chain constraints, geopolitical instability and limited market access have made it increasingly difficult to sustain our original ambitions”. About 12 Airbus A320s will leave the region to offer Wizz Air better ways to make money in Europe. Wizz hoped its JV partner in Abu Dhabi – the ADQ sovereign wealth fund – would help prise open market access to India and Pakistan. That did not happen, which is not surprising given India’s stance on adding bilateral capacity to the UAE. Wizz read the tea leaves wrong on this one and arguably should have pulled back earlier than it did.

Air Arabia is an LCC not adverse to axing ventures overseas if they don’t work. It has set up seven over the years with four surviving and three failing. The eighth is now on the runway and it could be the most significant yet.

On July 20, Saudi Arabia’s General Authority for Civil Aviation (GACA) awarded a LCC tender to a consortium led by Air Arabia and Saudi-based businesses Nesma Group and KUN Holding to operate from King Fahd International Airport in Dammam.

The fourth largest city in the Kingdom, located on the eastern coast of the country just 100km from Bahrain, Dammam has been itching to secure a home base LCC for some time, and now it has with the as-yet unnamed airline starting operations in 2026.

Savvy Air Arabia boss Adel Ali knows an LCC opportunity in Saudi Arabia is a major prize in the Middle East and will have fought hard, choosing the right partners, negotiating a sweet start-up incentive package, and working the political arena skilfully, to produce a successful bid.

Winning the chance to become established in Dammam, where traffic rights should not be as big a hurdle as Wizz Air found in Abu Dhabi, gives Air Arabia more than a fighting chance of JV number eight making it.

**Mark Pilling, Managing Editor**



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IMAGE: JOBY



## Joby completes first test flight of aerial taxi in Dubai

Joby Aviation successfully completed a series of piloted, vertical-takeoff-and-landing wing-borne flights in Dubai at the end of June, marking the start of its commercial market readiness efforts in the region.

A first in the eVTOL sector, these efforts will further develop Joby's readiness in anticipation of carrying its first passengers in 2026.

"The United Arab Emirates is a launchpad for a global revolution in how we move," said Joe Ben Bevirt, founder and CEO of Joby Aviation.

"In addition to building a performant aircraft, we've also been maturing our programme for anticipated passenger service with global operational capabilities and scalable, durable manufacturing.

"Our flights and operational footprint in Dubai are a monumental step toward weaving air taxi services into the fabric of daily life worldwide. With our visionary partners, we're igniting a future where quiet, clean flight is the new normal, and we're demonstrating the leadership of American innovation on the global stage."

## Flydubai maintains growth

Flydubai 'broke ground' in July on its new aircraft maintenance centre at Dubai South.

The multi-million-dollar facility, set to complete construction in the last quarter of 2026, will ensure an increased level of control and quicker maintenance turnaround for the carrier's growing fleet.

Spread over 32,600sqm, the maintenance centre will house an aircraft hangar, support workshops and office buildings.

Ghaith Al Ghaith, chief executive officer at flydubai, said: "Since launching operations in 2009, we have made great strides in enhancing connectivity and driving innovation, and the development of our new aircraft maintenance centre will play a key role in the

next chapter of our growth journey."

The carrier signed an agreement with Mohammed bin Rashid Aerospace Hub for its first purpose-built aircraft maintenance centre in 2023.

## Turkey's African Link

Turkish Airlines signed a comprehensive codeshare agreement in July with South Africa-based Airlink to strengthen its presence in Africa.

The agreement took effect August 1.

Turkish Airlines chief investment and strategy officer, Levent Konukcu, said: "At Turkish Airlines, we give importance to this cooperation with Airlink so as to enhance our connectivity in South Africa and the region.

"We aim to improve our partnership to maximise the travel opportunities offered to our guests.

"We believe that this partnership will not only bring benefits to both carriers from a commercial perspective, but also improve the cultural and tourism relations between the two countries."

## Alia ops

A new cargo warehouse at Queen Alia International Airport (QAIA), equipped with cargo handling technology by LoDige Industries for Aviation Handling Service (AHS), a partner of Menzies Aviation, is now officially in operation.

The terminal spans 8,000 sqm, and handling capacity will increase to 60,000 tons per year.

The fully-equipped new cargo terminal enables AHS/Menzies in Amman to automate cargo handling and provide its customers with a high-performance service for long-term growth at QAIA.



Bahrain minister of finance and national economy, Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, and U.S. commerce secretary, Howard Lutnick, joined Boeing Commercial Airplanes president and CEO Stephanie Pope and Gulf Air group chairman Khalid Taqi to witness the signing.

IMAGE: GULF AIR

## Gulf Air orders 18 Boeing Dreamliners

Gulf Air has made an order with Boeing to purchase 12 787 Dreamliner aircraft with options for six more. Once finalised, the order will bring the carrier's firm order book to 14 of the widebody jets.

"This agreement marks a transformative step in Gulf Air's strategic growth journey as we expand our global footprint and modernise our fleet with one of the industry's most advanced and efficient aircraft," said Khalid Taqi, chairman of Gulf Air Group.

"The Boeing 787 Dreamliner has proven to be an exceptional aircraft for our long-haul operations, and this new order reflects our confidence in its performance, passenger appeal and contribution to our sustainability goals. We are proud to deepen our partnership with Boeing and reaffirm our commitment to positioning Bahrain as a key global aviation hub."

## Mosul Airport reopens

A rebuilt Mosul Airport (OSM) was formally reopened by Iraqi prime minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani in July.

Al-Sudani said the airport will begin accepting commercial flights “within two months” for the first time since 2014.

OSM has not been operational since the Islamic State group overran Mosul in northern Iraq in June 2014. Subsequent fighting to liberate Mosul caused heavy damage to the airport, which has been in the process of being rebuilt over the last several years. The airport will have the capacity to handle 630,000 passengers and 30,000 tons of cargo annually.

## LEAP forward

Gulf Air and CFM International have extended the airline’s long-term CFM LEAP-1A Services for Airbus A320neo family aircraft.

“We are delighted to strengthen our partnership with CFM, who have been a key partner of our growth since our first CFM engine operations in the 1990s,” said Dr. Jeffrey Goh, CEO of Gulf Air Group. “This agreement will enable us to secure MRO capacity for our fleet and maintain our growth.”

## Engine order

EgyptAir has ordered six additional Trent XWB-84 engines from Rolls-Royce.

This order, which will power six Airbus A350-900 aircraft, brings EgyptAir’s total commitment to the Trent XWB-84 engine to 32 units.

Rolls-Royce will provide comprehensive maintenance and health services for the engines through its TotalCare service, ensuring optimal performance and reliability for EgyptAir’s operations.



IMAGE: AIR ARABIA

## Air Arabia launches new low-cost carrier

Air Arabia has confirmed that it has secured regulatory approval to launch a new budget airline in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi’s General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) announced that a consortium led by UAE-based Air Arabia, along with Kun Investment Holding and Nesma Holding, won the bid to operate the new carrier.

The new national low-cost airline will serve operations based out of King Fahd International Airport in Dammam. It plans to build up to operations with a fleet of 45 aircraft, covering 24

domestic and 57 international destinations, and aims to serve 10 million passengers annually.

Adel Al Ali, group chief executive officer of Air Arabia, said: “As a leading low-cost airline operator in the region, this achievement represents a key milestone that reaffirms our commitment to supporting the growth and development of the Kingdom’s aviation sector. This new partnership will deliver a reliable and value-driven travel experience for passengers and will contribute to driving national economic growth.”



Prof. Ahmet Bolat, Turkish Airlines chairman of the board and the executive committee, and Andy Cronin, Avolon CEO, signed the agreement at the Paris Air Show in June.  
IMAGE: AVOLON

## Avolon to lease 10 Airbus A321neos to Türkiye’s AJet

Aviation finance company Avolon has agreed to lease 10 Airbus A321neos to AJet, the low-cost carrier subsidiary of Turkish Airlines. The new aircraft are scheduled to be delivered in 2027.

The aircraft will support AJet’s fleet renewal and network expansion strategy. AJet currently operates 92 aircraft flying to 100 destinations in Türkiye, the Middle East, Europe, North Africa and CIS.

Prof. Ahmet Bolat, Turkish Airlines chairman of the board and the executive committee, said: “The addition of these next-generation A321neo aircraft will support AJet’s growth strategy, while contributing to our sustainability goals with improved fuel efficiency and lower emissions.”

Andy Cronin, Avolon CEO, added: “Our large A320neo family order book is in high demand from airlines who are looking to expand their route networks and renew their fleet with new technology aircraft.

“This positions us as a preferred partner for airlines and, coupled with our scale and balance sheet strength, will drive sustained growth for the business well into the next decade.”

## Order of business

Saudia has taken a step forward in its digital transformation by moving to more guest-centric operations and translating traditional booking records (PNRs) and electronic tickets into Orders.

An Order provides a real-time, consolidated view of all services, enabling the airline to better serve the traveller at every touchpoint – from booking and payment to fulfilment and servicing.

Arved von zur Muehlen, CCO, Saudia said: “Moving to single Orders means we can gain a better understanding of our guests, what they’ve purchased from us, and our partners across the entire journey.”

## MRO approval

MRO company Joramco has received the approval from the Civil Aviation Regulatory Commission (CARC) to perform line and

base maintenance checks on the Embraer ERJ-190 series, powered by PW1900G engine.

Fraser Currie, CEO of Joramco, said: “Introducing the Embraer E2 to our capabilities is a strategic step aligned with our long-term roadmap and in support of Jordan’s national flag carrier, Royal Jordanian. This milestone reinforces our commitment to supporting the needs of our customers and expanding our ability to serve a broader range of modern fleets.”

## One-stop security

The General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) of Saudi Arabia and the Government of the UK have signed a one-stop security agreement.

Under the agreement, passengers travelling from UK airports via Saudi Arabia will no longer be required to undergo security screening during transit. Security





IMAGE: AIR ALGÉRIE

## Air Algérie places order for 16 new ATR 72-600s

ATR made a major order in July from its long-standing partner Air Algérie for 16 brand new ATR 72-600 aircraft.

This strategic acquisition also includes an ATR 72-600 full-flight simulator – the first of its kind in Africa – marking a significant milestone in regional aviation training on the continent.

Air Algérie, ATR's largest customer in Africa, has been operating ATR aircraft since 2003.

Deliveries of the new aircraft are scheduled between 2026 and 2028. Equipped with latest generation PW127XT engines, the 72-seat ATR 72-600s will be operated by a newly-created regional subsidiary of Air Algérie – Domestic Airlines.

It will be focused on enhancing connectivity across the nation, especially in the southern regions of the country – areas where air travel is essential for economic and social growth.

procedures completed at UK airports will be recognised at Saudi airports, allowing for faster connections and reduced transit times, while maintaining international standards of aviation safety and security.

### First date

'Emirates First' has officially opened at terminal 3, Dubai International (DXB), offering a 'luxurious' airport experience for Emirates' first-class customers and Skywards platinum members.

Adel al Redha, Emirates' chief operating officer, said: "Emirates First is one of the areas that will offer a unique and private environment to our first-class customers and Skywards platinum members."

"We know our customers value privacy and convenience, and this will provide another level of hospitality to the check-in experience, as part of our efforts to continuously uplift the overall travel journey."

### Fleet afoot

Dnata has deployed a fleet of autonomous vehicles at Dubai World Central – Al Maktoum International (DWC), introducing next-generation technology in ramp operations. Dnata now operates six electric tractors – the EZTow model developed by TractEasy – at DWC.

Traditionally, baggage is transported between the terminal and aircraft by human drivers, each operating under tight time constraints.

The new autonomous vehicles streamline this process by towing up to four baggage containers (ULDs) at a time at speeds of up to 15 km/h, following pre-defined routes.

### China expansion

Etihad Cargo is reinforcing the carrier's commitment to expanding access across Asia-Pacific after signing a strategic cooperation agreement with Ezhou Huahu Airport.

As part of the agreement, Etihad Cargo will strengthen its strategic presence at Ezhou Huahu Airport, which will serve as a key gateway within its broader China network. This complements the carrier's ongoing operations in Shanghai and Shenzhen, ensuring nationwide access and greater flexibility.

### Flight data

Acron Aviation has signed a multi-year contract with Air Cairo to provide a fully-outsourced flight data monitoring (FDM) service, based on its industry-leading flight data connect (FDC) platform. The service will cover the entire Air Cairo fleet, which includes ATR, Embraer and Airbus aircraft types.

### Simulator purchase

Turkish Airlines has placed an additional order for one Boeing 737 MAX full-flight simulator (FFS) from HAVELSAN to be delivered in January 2026.



IMAGE: EMIRATES

## Emirates Group set to recruit 17,300 professionals across 350 roles

The Emirates Group has launched a recruitment drive to power its next era of innovation and expansion.

This financial year, Emirates Airline and Group, said: "The Emirates Group is set to recruit 17,300 professionals across 350 roles."

These roles span every facet, function and operations across Emirates and dnata, a global air and travel services provider. Hundreds of new recruits are required across some roles, including cabin crew, pilots, engineers, commercial and sales teams, customer service, ground handling, catering, IT, HR and finance. Dnata is looking to hire more than 4,000 cargo, catering and ground-handling specialists.

HH Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, chairman and chief executive, Emirates Airline and Group, said: "The Emirates Group's people strategy is anchored in Dubai's Economic Agenda D33 and our own projected growth and expansion. We're seeking world-class talent to fuel our bold ambition, redefine the future of aviation, and continue our commitment and culture of innovation and excellence."



*Captain Ahmed Adel has returned to the top job at EgyptAir with a brief to take the carrier to a new performance level over the coming five years. Mark Pilling reports.*

# ADEL'S BACK TO THE FUTURE

**W**hen the call comes to return to run your country's flag carrier and its holding company do you really have a choice?

Probably not, but the challenge of, once again, becoming the chairman and CEO of EgyptAir holding company, is clearly one that Captain Ahmed Adel relishes.

Asked what his country's government wants to see from a new man at the top, Adel is diplomatic: "I would look at it as a continuation," he said.

He is careful not to comment on the former leadership when asked about EgyptAir's changing of the guard. Adel was appointed on February 23 this year. He replaced engineer Yehia Zakaria, who became the head of EgyptAir's maintenance division in January 2022 before rising to lead EgyptAir Holding in October that year.

"There was a new minister, Dr Sameh Elhefny, and he asked me if I wanted to come back on board because we have worked together for a long time," said Adel. They share long careers in EgyptAir with both flying the airline's Airbus A330/A340 fleet as captains, instructors and examiners.

Both also have stints leading EgyptAir, with Elhefny taking the reins in 2014/15, and Adel holding the position from 2018-2020. Elhefny, who was appointed minister of civil aviation in July 2024, also served as chairman of the Egyptian Civil Aviation Authority in 2018.

"I looked into the plans and the opportunities, and it's very exciting to be back," said Adel. "You must really believe in the project."

And there are many positives to find in Egypt's aviation story. "I'm a believer in EgyptAir and its ambitious plans, because we are placed geographically in a very good area in the world," he explained. "The economy in Egypt is very promising. In the next five years there's a lot of expansion. The country is very bullish on airports. There are plans at our Cairo hub for a terminal four, which will more than double the capacity of Cairo airport."

"In tandem with these ambitious government plans EgyptAir has to cope, develop and grow at the same time," said Adel.

Having held the office for two years just prior

to the pandemic, in addition to holding several leadership positions during this EgyptAir career, Adel is more than familiar with the responsibility he holds, in addition to understating how to navigate the political environment in his country.

Adel's task is to take one of Africa's largest flag carriers to a higher level, taking advantage of one of the region's busiest domestic markets with strong traffic flows into the Middle East, Africa, Europe and further afield.

Dr Elhefny set out three key priorities for captain Adel when he joined: "The restructuring plan, increasing profitability and having a seamless introduction of the new aircraft into our fleet," he explained. This goes alongside "maintaining our very good levels of safety and operational quality".

## Restructuring plan

**W**hen Adel was in charge at the end of the last decade, EgyptAir was working with global consultancy Bain & Co on its strategy. The restructuring plan being established at that time was derailed by the pandemic.

The aviation industry shrank and then regrouped, and today demand has returned with a vengeance. "We are looking to continue our ambitious plans in growing EgyptAir and expanding our fleet and destinations."

"The first thing I did when I was appointed was to work on recouping this restructuring plan," said Adel. "Now we are looking into one of the top tier consultancy firms to start working with us again, to update and continue our restructuring plan."

The scale of change needed will be assessed as the strategy unfolds. However, Adel characterises it as a "complete

restructuring plan" building on "promising" growth and the potential for more with EgyptAir's revenues rising by eight per cent in 2024.

"We are still in the planning phase so we will wait for the work scopes and announce the plans every quarter and the progress that we are having on the ground," he said.

On the benefit of bringing in a consultancy, Adel sees the combination of EgyptAir's management team and an outside player mixing to formulate the best result. "We have very good teams, and they are very experienced, but you can always have somebody with a different vantage point," he noted.

On top of its eight per cent revenue hike in its financial year to the end of June, EgyptAir also saw traffic grow by five per cent. "This is very promising, and we're expecting to maintain or

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“ We are a very well-established airline and we've been through a lot of challenges. But we have weathered all the storms. Some of the challenges, like Covid, like the geopolitical situations that happen in the world and in the region, are out of our hands. We work in a very tough region. ”

CAPTAIN AHMED ADEL



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

exceed this in the next fiscal year,” said Adel.

EgyptAir has been profitable at the operating and net level as have all its subsidiaries for the last two financial years, stated Adel. This follows a lengthy period during the previous decade where profits proved elusive.

The one thing putting a spanner in the works is fleet expansion. “We had a big challenge because of the late deliveries of the aircraft that we ordered,” he noted.

This has stunted growth; however, Adel understands pushing too hard on growth may be counterproductive. “We always aspire for more and we would like to push the numbers, but we also must be realistic about it, because what we would like to do is, over the next five years, is organic growth so everything is established.

“We do not want to be taking one step forward and two steps back. You want to always be moving forward so instead of taking a big leap in a short period of time, we want to do it over the years organically,” he explained.

This means a measured fleet ramp up, gradually expanding the network and adding airline partners to bolster the network.

“You need to work on many fronts [at the same time]: on the MRO front to be capable of adapting to fleet growth, on the training and hiring of qualified people when you’re expanding, and also on ensuring that the establishment itself has its feet firmly on the ground,” said Adel.

#### Profitable routes

As with all carriers in the Middle East, a sometimes-fraught geo-political climate brings many challenges, both operational and financial.

“We are a very well-established airline and we’ve been through a lot of challenges. But we have weathered all the storms. Some of the challenges, like Covid, like the geopolitical situations that happen in the world and in the region, are out of our hands. We work in a very tough region,” he said.

“Some of our most profitable routes are in Libya, Sudan, Syria, and Lebanon,” noted Adel, with large traffic flows between these countries and Egypt. “When something happens in one of these countries, it affects our bottom line,” said Adel.

EgyptAir is flying to Libya and Lebanon currently, while Sudan is served “on and off”, depending on the situation. A return to Syria is planned “very soon”, with several carriers adding Damascus back into their schedules as the political situation there allows.

EgyptAir would have expanded faster, but aircraft delivery delays have arrested its growth rate.

“We are waiting to reconnect with all of our network because we are waiting for our fleet to be complete,” said Adel. “We were supposed to receive a lot of aircraft this year, and they have been postponed for a good 12 months.”



Captain Adel signed up for more A350s at the Paris Air Show, seen here with Airbus sales chief Benoît de Saint-Exupéry. IMAGE: AIRBUS

In the past, EgyptAir talked about a target of a fleet of 125 aircraft serving some 100 destinations by 2030.

Adel is reviewing these numbers, and they will stay broadly aligned, but slightly lower. “It is not about tempering ambitions, but being more realistic. We all understand the huge industry challenge of the supply chain. All aircraft are late, all operators are extending the life of their [existing] aircraft,” he explained.

The carrier operates a mixed fleet of 65 aircraft today consisting of Airbus A320 family and A330s, Boeing 737-800s, 777-300ERs and 787-9s.

In May, EgyptAir signed a deal with lessor AerCap to extend the leases on its fleet of five Boeing 777-300ERs and announced it is undertaking the cabin refurbishment of 19 737-800s and two Airbus A330-200s to ensure it can serve its network needs and keep its product standards high, explained Adel.

The desire to extend the 777-lease contract, by 18 months until November 2026, is because EgyptAir will only begin receiving the first of 10 A350-900s from Airbus in December this year. “I really appreciate the relationship with AerCap, they have been very supportive,” said Adel.

EgyptAir signed its order for 10 Airbus A350-900s at the Dubai Air Show in 2023 as it sought to renew its long-haul fleet. The plan is for EgyptAir to take delivery of a further six A350-900s in 2026, he said.

At the Paris Air Show in June, the carrier decided to upgrade its six outstanding A350

options into firm orders to ensure it has a strong delivery stream of widebodies into the early 2030s.

“With everything that’s happening with the supply chain and the demand that’s very high on all types of aircraft, widebodies and narrowbodies, we decided to exercise the options to be on track with our fleet renovation,” said Adel.

EgyptAir will take a further six A350-900s in 2026 with the final three from its original firm order arriving by 2030, said Adel.

The six further aircraft will be delivered between 2030 and 2033, he added.

#### Narrowbody expansion

To expand its narrowbody capacity, EgyptAir will take the first of 18 737-8 Maxs, all leased from Air Lease Corporation, in January 2026, with a further seven being delivered during next year, said Adel.

With the new aircraft deliveries and the return of the leased 777s, EgyptAir’s current fleet plan takes it to a total fleet of 97 aircraft by 2030, he explained.

A smooth induction of the new A350s and 737s is the airline’s priority with further orders not on the cards. “We are not going to exercise any more RFPs to extend the fleet or get new aircraft because we are waiting to get our [on order] aircraft,” said Adel. “We do not want to be overwhelmed either financially or on the workload front.

“If we want to go to 105 or 110 [total fleet





Today EgyptAir operates a mixed fleet of 65 aircraft including Airbus A320neo family models as seen here. IMAGES:EGYPTAIR

size] this would be a tactical decision, but we will not think about it before the first quarter of 2026," he added.

EgyptAir's MRO arm is undertaking the cabin refurbishment of its 19 737-800s with the first one going into its shop in June and the entire batch completed by the end of 2026. Fitted with new Collins Aerospace seats and Panasonic IFE, the 737s will feature 160 seats compared to the 144 in the current layout, reducing the weight of each aircraft by 140kg.

EgyptAir has just gained board approval for a similar refresh of two of its remaining four A330-200s, said Adel. This will give them the same cabin as its new A350s. EgyptAir Engineering will also conduct this work, slated for the second half of 2025.

Its final two A330-200s will be sent to Dresden-based EFW for conversion to freighters in September and November. When completed the carrier will expand its widebody freighter fleet of A330-200s to five aircraft.

A good sign of EgyptAir's industry standing is the number of people interested in financing the carrier's expanding fleet. "When you are approached by a lot of reputable people in the business it means you are standing on firm ground," said Adel.

Adel is at pains to stress that aviation is a "sensitive industry" with a critical need to understand the market environment. The need to move cautiously at a time when Star Alliance member EgyptAir is expanding its fleet and network at speed is paramount.

The carrier currently serves around 87 destinations, a number that will grow to 100 by 2030. Adel said that routes to Montreal in North America and Sao Paulo in Brazil are in its sights. The latter would be its first route into South America while it already serves Washington, New York JFK and Newark and Toronto in North America.

A service to Los Angeles is also being planned, possibly for 2026 or in 2027, he added.

To the east of Egypt, the carrier is interested in flying to Singapore and adding a couple of cities in China to the three that it already serves. The carrier's network plan is on the work scope with the new consultancy. In addition, the new destinations will come online over the coming five years as its A350s arrive.

"We operate to 26 points in Africa, and we are looking to expand to more than 30 points as it is an important market for us and connectivity is very important in Africa," said Adel.

#### Cairo terminal growth

Overall, EgyptAir's connectivity traffic is around 30 per cent, but this is expected to grow as its Cairo International Airport hub grows.

The Egyptian government has announced a \$4bn investment to build a new terminal at Cairo by 2030 to boost its capacity from today's 28 million passengers annually to 40 million. This is much needed to enable the carrier to meet its growth ambitions in addition to meeting Egypt's tourism aspirations.

As its fleet grows, EgyptAir is undertaking a

significant investment at its engineering and maintenance subsidiary. This operation is already one of the largest and most capable in Africa.

The centrepiece of the expansion is Hangar 9000 which will add to its existing three hangars and ensure it has the capacity to maintain its growing fleet and service its 130 third-party customers, said Adel.

The final approvals for Hangar 9000 are close to being agreed and it will take three-four years to build. It will be able to handle three 777s simultaneously.

It also recently signed a deal with Rolls-Royce to perform more MRO services on Trent 700 engine modules.

Former EgyptAir management has expressed interest in bringing in joint venture partners for some of its subsidiaries. "This will be determined or will become clearer after we start working with a consultancy firm, because this is in one of our work scopes," noted Adel.

If the answer is partnerships, then "we are going towards it. If it's something that we can do ourselves and we can do well, we would like to do it ourselves," said Adel.

These are questions for the coming few years. For now, Adel is focused on the strategy and actions needed to enable EgyptAir, and its subsidiaries, to scale up smoothly, induct a host of new aircraft and launch new destinations.

As he concentrates on taking the EgyptAir platform to the next level Adel will continue to keep flying A330/A340 widebodies, both for EgyptAir and the government. ▲



Kuwait Airways has suffered from a revolving door of CEOs in recent years.  
IMAGE: ALAN DRON

# Has Kuwait's interest in aviation taken a nose dive?

*The dismissal of Kuwait Airways' CEO in May was the latest problem to face an airline that has struggled with its country's apparent lack of interest in aviation, say analysts.*

**Alan Dron reports.**

**W**hy has Kuwait not embraced the aviation ethos that has been seized by every other Gulf nation? The UAE is the biggest proponent of using aviation as a major plank of its national economic platform, with roughly 30 per cent of the country's entire GDP coming from aviation or aviation-related industries.

Qatar also punches well above its weight in the sector with multi award-winning Qatar Airways, while Saudi Arabia, having seen the economic success those two nations have achieved, has launched a huge effort to emulate them; new airlines, maintenance facilities and a massive effort to attract inbound tourism are among the initiatives that aim to diversify its economy.

Even smaller players such as Bahrain (Gulf Air) and Oman (Oman Air and SalamAir) recognise the benefits that airlines can bring and are expanding steadily.

But Kuwait? The country seems uninterested. Kuwait Airways seems permanently to languish, with periodic attempts to privatise the state-owned carrier blocked in the country's parliament.

The country has become something of an aviation backwater, according to Saj Ahmad, chief analyst at StrategicAero Research in the UK. Kuwaiti governments "have never really done anything to lure international passengers for leisure or business", he noted. Unlike virtually every other Gulf state, Kuwait has few major tourist attractions. Poor connectivity at Kuwait International Airport also means a lack of transit traffic. Business travellers generally only fly to Kuwait if they have business to conduct there.

In recent months, several major international carriers, such as British Airways, KLM and Lufthansa, have dropped services to Kuwait. Various reasons have been given, but an underlying theme is that the airlines feel their aircraft can be more profitably deployed elsewhere.

Additionally, Ahmad said, "Had it not been for state intervention, there is no way Kuwait Airways would continue to exist as it does. I just wonder if there's merit for someone to come in and take them over, but I don't think the Kuwaiti government is going to be amenable to that."

The recent dismissal of Kuwait Airways CEO Ahmad Al-Kreebani "is emblematic of a broader pattern of instability,

fragmentation, and misalignment that continues to hamper Kuwait's aviation industry", Linus Benjamin Bauer, founder and managing director of Dubai-based consultants BAA & Partners said.

"What should be a strategic asset for national growth instead remains weighed down by institutional inertia, regulatory bottlenecks, and inconsistent leadership."

Al-Kreebani, was dismissed in May after just two years in the role, following criticism by the country's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). The regulator cited repeated failures to meet safety standards and correct regulatory deficiencies.

However, said Bauer, Al-Kreebani's ousting reflected a deeper governance vacuum at Kuwait Airways.

Board-level weakness persists, he said, with little autonomy or accountability mechanisms in place.

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Additionally, the airline has had at least five CEOs over the past decade – an astonishing leadership churn rate. These continual changes disrupt continuity.

Ahmad believes that the revolving door of CEOs is due to government ministers wanting to put their own stamp on their departments – and Kuwait Airways. "If a CEO has a plan in place and it doesn't align with what the minister wants ... they feel they're better plying their trade elsewhere."

On the national stage, according to Bauer, "Kuwait Airways and Jazeera Airways operate under fundamentally different models – state-owned legacy vs. private low-cost carrier – with minimal coordination. Rather than complement each other, they compete over limited market space, with no integrated national aviation strategy."

The DGCA, while right to enforce safety compliance, often acts more as a gatekeeper than an enabler, he said. "Route permissions, bilateral approvals, and airport slot allocations are slow and unpredictable. Regional peers like Saudi Arabia and the UAE have leapfrogged Kuwait by liberalising and modernising policy frameworks.

"Kuwait lacks a clear vision of what it wants its aviation sector to achieve."



# ICAO STEPS IN TO HELP UNBLOCK AVIATION IN SYRIA

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) is stepping in to help restore the aviation infrastructure in Syria.

Labouring under US and European sanctions, Syria's commercial aviation sector has been at a low ebb for many years. Its airlines – national carrier Syrian Air and private operator Cham Wings – have been blocked in attempts to expand their operations. Syrian Air, for example, is believed to be operating only three of its Airbus A320s, with six more parked, together with two A340s. There is a widely reported lack of spare parts.

Airports also lack modern equipment.

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Getting the country's civil aviation system back on its feet will take time, as well as help from other parties. Which is why an agreement between Syria and ICAO, the United Nations' aviation organisation, is significant.

The agreement, with Syria's General Authority for Civil Aviation (GACA), aims to modernise the country's aviation infrastructure, to enable it to rejoin the global air transport network.

The management service agreement, signed by GACA president Ashhad Al-Salibi and ICAO regional director Mohamed Abubaker Farea, launched a major effort to restore Syria's air transport operations to international standards.

ICAO will support Syria in conducting a



Syrian Air is believed to be operating only three of its Airbus A320s.

IMAGE: SYRIAN AIRLINES

comprehensive gap analysis to identify areas where improvements need to be made and develop an action plan to do so. The collaboration will also focus on enhancing Syria's aviation institutions to establish a solid foundation for regulatory and operational efficiency.

This will require a major effort; for that reason, ICAO is engaging with donor countries and international organisations to find the necessary financial and technical support.

In February 2025, the European Union lifted sanctions on Syrian Air, along with other organisations. Temporary US sanctions waivers have

been in place since the start of the year and permanent sanctions relief measures were under discussion in the US Congress at the time of writing.

In the aftermath of the Assad regime, the problems facing the country's aviation infrastructure became clear. Syrian news outlets reported that Damascus International Airport had slowly deteriorated into a rudimentary hub, with outdated electronic systems and little modern airport equipment.

However, airlines, particularly from the surrounding region, have been swift to re-establish flights into Syria, an indication of the airline industry's desire to tap into the reviving Syrian market. ▲



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# Oman Air's world of difference

Oman Air's formal accession to the Oneworld alliance on June 30 was another milestone on the carrier's transformation process towards restoring profitability. **Alan Dron reports.**



Joining the 14-airline alliance brings particular benefits to a medium-sized airline such as Oman Air, CEO Con Korfiatis told Arabian Aerospace.

"We're never going to order 200-300 aircraft and fly to every airport in the world," but "Oneworld jacks it up on steroids. It gives us an expanded footprint infinitely larger than we have today," he said.

Under Korfiatis and his team, Oman Air's transformation programme is speeding up; the fleet and workforce are being trimmed to a more appropriate size, with the latter shrinking significantly, from 4,200 to around 3,100.

"It was essential to do that early, because for the rest of the transformation you want to have that restructuring in place and have the team that's going to achieve the transformation," Korfiatis said.



Cutting positions is always sensitive and challenging, and the company has been at pains to find new roles for those whose positions have become redundant, either elsewhere in the company or in the country's aviation eco-system. Those who could not be accommodated left with redundancy packages of up to two years' salary.

Staff numbers may continue to drift downwards: "I think that will come through automation," Korfiatis said. "We still have too many systems that are manual." Natural attrition will also play a role.

Network-wise, the airline is starting to expand again; Oman Air's Oneworld accession occurred the day after its inaugural flight to Amsterdam. And in October, the airline restores its double-daily London frequency, one of its most important sectors.

Meanwhile, Oman Air's 2030 fleet strategy will see more Boeing 787-9s and 737 MAX 8s arriving. The company has 23 MAX 8s at present and hopes to reach 25 or 26 next

year. Like many airlines, it has been forced to retain older-generation 737s in service longer than anticipated because of late deliveries from Boeing.

Korfiatis believes that the company may need a small number of additional MAX 8s in the short term, with leases being likely.

"Looking far out, we'll probably need to look at what our fleet strategy is for the early 2030s. By that time, the early 787s and MAXs will be coming off lease and there's an opportunity there to run a campaign [for new aircraft]," he said.

That campaign is likely to get under way late this year or early 2026, with a decision on new narrowbodies and widebodies coming sometime next year.

Meanwhile, some 737-8s currently being delivered are in a new configuration for Oman Air, a single-class cabin with 189 seats. There will eventually be a sub-class of five, for

use primarily to and from the Indian subcontinent, hoovering up the region's traditional low-yield traffic.

Korfiatis sees opportunities for the high-density 737s



**Top: Oman Air CEO Con Korfiatis and his management team are steering the airline through a far-reaching transformation programme, to restore profitability.**

IMAGE: BILLYPIX

**Above: The airline's fleet is being simplified into two main types: Boeing 737 MAX 8 narrowbodies and Boeing 787-9 twin-aisles. Orders for more of both are anticipated.**

IMAGE: OMAN AIR

to be deployed into Africa and Oman Air is considering acquiring more.

Over the past year, disposals from the fleet have included 10 Airbus A330s (four -200s and six -300s), a Boeing 737-80BCF freighter and two Boeing 787-8s.

Oman, meanwhile, is pressing ahead with attempts to expand inbound tourism, and has one unique product with which to draw visitors.

In early summer, the edge of the Indian Ocean monsoon brushes the coast of southwest Oman, bringing mist, rain and temperatures around 20C when the Arabian Peninsula is sweltering in 40C or above. Wadis run with streams and greenery bursts out around Salalah, Oman's second city.

This has been a draw for Gulf Arabs for years, but the phenomenon is starting to attract attention from further afield, with several Central and Eastern European airlines now operating flights direct into Salalah.

For its part, Oman Air now operates up to 12 seasonal daily flights between Muscat and Salalah. Korfiatis and his team are looking at operating future international flights direct into Oman's second city.

Oman Air is also encouraging stopovers in Muscat. That programme is doing well and the airline has teamed up with major European holiday company TUI to promote the service.

Previously, as much as 85 per cent of Oman Air's traffic was transit. This generally provides lower yields than 'origin and destination' passengers and the company's efforts have "moved the needle on that", Korfiatis said. ▲

*Etihad Airways is planning to use its new Airbus A321LRs to bring widebody standards to narrowbody routes, according to a senior executive.*

**Alan Dron** investigates.

# SUITE SENSATION

**First-class cabin:** The new aircraft will have just two first-class suites, each with space for a travelling companion to sit. IMAGE: ETIHAD AIRWAYS

Versatility is the underlying benefit that the UAE flag-carrier will gain from its incoming Airbus A321LRs, according to Arik De, the company's chief revenue and commercial officer.

The new aircraft will bring new levels of service to the airline's single-aisle fleet, allow 'mixing-and-matching' with widebodies to cope with varying levels of demand to destinations and bring financial viability to certain destinations that could never support a widebody aircraft, said Arik De.

The A321LR can fly 4,000nm, around 300nm longer than its A321ceo predecessor, with around 20 per cent lower fuel consumption.

The Abu Dhabi-based airline is emphasising the new aircraft's improved customer experience, with just 160 seats – two first-class 'suites', 14 lie-flat business-class and 144 economy – in an aircraft that typically seats between 180 to 220.

"With our new First Suites, 14 lie-flat business seats with direct-aisle access, and upgraded economy, we've taken the luxury experience which we are famed for on our widebody fleet and adapted it to offer guests the same experience in a single-aisle aircraft," CEO Antonio Neves said when the aircraft was unveiled in April.

The First Suites will have a private, enclosed space with a sliding door, lie-flat bed, elevated dining, and bespoke design touches normally reserved for long-haul widebodies. It offers additional space for a companion to sit.

The new business cabin features widebody-style seats, all forward facing with direct aisle access in a herringbone layout.

Economy seats offer up to five-inch recline and, at 18.4-inch wide, are one of the widest economy seats in the industry.

All passengers will have access to streaming, social media, surfing and gaming onboard, in addition to live television, courtesy of a Viasat satellite system.



In the UAE and all destinations with first-class cabins, guests will have a private chauffeur service to and from the airport. First-class guests will be personally escorted through a dedicated check-in to the Etihad First lounge and then for boarding. On arrival, guests will be accompanied from the aircraft door to their chauffeur, with porter services taking care of the luggage.

Etihad's first Airbus A321LR will arrive as this issue of *Arabian Aerospace* appears and is scheduled to enter service on August 1, on the Phuket, Thailand route. Etihad has 20 on firm order, but this may increase to as many as 40 in

coming years. The first 10 will arrive by year-end, De said.

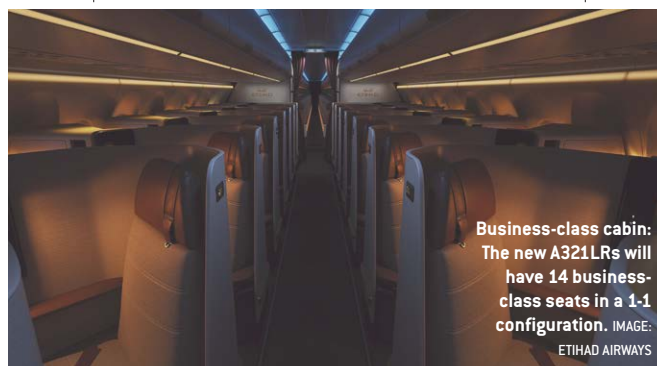
The aircraft will fly from Abu Dhabi's Zayed International Airport to a mix of European, southeast Asian and African destinations, including Algiers, Athens, Bangkok, Chennai, Copenhagen, Düsseldorf, Milan, Paris, Riyadh and Tunis.

Some of the European routes provide a good example of the A321LR's versatility, De said. Currently, the Düsseldorf service is operated by four Boeing 787s a week; the A321LR will allow that to be upgraded to a daily service. The Saint Petersburg sector, meanwhile, is highly seasonal – very busy in winter, but over the summer, the A321LR may provide the necessary smaller scale when passenger loads drop off.

Similarly, a route such as Abu Dhabi-Paris, which is normally operated by the 787-9, could benefit from smaller aircraft at certain times of day. Morning and evening peak hour departures from the French capital are served by the US airliner, but "Is there a market for a 2pm Paris departure where there could be demand for a narrow-gauge [aircraft], but where people want to have the flat-bed experience?" The A321LR is being trialled in that slot.

Although the new aircraft has a 4,000nm range, Etihad is unlikely to use the aircraft to its maximum, De added: "Six to seven hours" – roughly 3,200nm – "we think will be the maximum."

Some older Airbus A321ceos will exit the fleet in coming years as the A321LRs arrive: "We don't envisage having any A321s without the full flat-bed experience," De said. ▲



**Business-class cabin:** The new A321LRs will have 14 business-class seats in a 1-1 configuration. IMAGE: ETIHAD AIRWAYS



A large Moroccan delegation was present at this year's Paris Air Show at Le Bourget to promote the kingdom's industrial ecosystem and boost the attractiveness of its aerospace sector. **Anuradha Deenapanray Chappard** reports.



## Morocco finds its perfect matches in Paris

The Moroccan delegation was led by Ryad Mezzour, minister of industry and trade, and Abdessamad Kayouh, minister of transport and logistics. According to Ryad Mezzour, this impressive participation is part of the dynamism of the aeronautics ecosystem, which has transformed “the aerospace sector into a strategic lever for industrial development in the Kingdom, and a promising area to strengthen our country's industrial and technological sovereignty”.

Today, more than 150 companies operate in the four ecosystems of the sector: assembly, the electrical wiring interconnect system, MRO and engineering.

The Moroccan aerospace sector is witnessing sustained growth in 2025. Latest data from Morocco's foreign exchange office show that exports in the sector were up 14 per cent at the end of April 2025 compared with the same period last year.

Morocco has consolidated its aerospace footprint during the second quarter of 2025.

German group Masterflex, which manufactures hose systems and technical components for the aerospace industry, will launch a new plant in the MIDPARC free zone near Casablanca. The project represents an investment of three million euros over five years, and is part of the group's global expansion strategy to meet the soaring demand in the aerospace sector worldwide.

Last April, Airbus signed a definitive agreement with Spirit AeroSystems to acquire strategic industrial assets for its commercial aircraft programmes. Many plants worldwide are concerned including the Casablanca site to supply components for the Airbus A321 and A220.

During the same month, Embraer and Moroccan authorities signed a MoU to explore potential joint projects.

Morocco's aerospace industry has demonstrated strong capabilities in areas such as aerostructures, machining, sheet metal work and composites. The cooperation could also include training programmes, MRO capabilities and

additional areas for potential collaboration, such as research and technology.

Furthermore, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates will strengthen technical cooperation and anticipate major developments in air transport.

The agreement signed last May between the Directorate General of Civil Aviation of Morocco and the General Civil Aviation Authority of the UAE aims at strengthening relations between the two countries in the civil aviation sector. It focuses on three areas: strategic infrastructure planning, integration of artificial intelligence into air traffic management, and promotion of sustainable practices.

At the Paris Air Show, Boeing also took another major step forward in its investment strategy in Morocco with an agreement with Casablanca Aéronautique (a subsidiary of Figearc

Aéro) to manufacture parts for the Boeing 737 MAX. Boeing had signed a partnership agreement with the Moroccan authorities to set up an African Centre of Manufacturing Excellence (ACME) during the last Marrakech Air Show.

The Paris Air Show also saw the signing of a MoU between Morocco and India's Genset Aerospace and IT Pvt Ltd for the development and production of a multi-purpose business aircraft, and an agreement with Le Piston Français to extend its industrial site for the production of engine parts.

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Despite announcements prior to Paris-Le Bourget 2025, Royal Air Maroc (RAM) hasn't signed any aircraft order. The Moroccan national airline is currently negotiating with Boeing and Airbus to increase its fleet of aircraft. This could concern 24 Boeing 787s, up to 50 Boeing 737s and 20 Airbus A220s.

These new aircraft are part of the contract signed in July 2023 between RAM and the Moroccan government to support the airline's expansion plan and position it as a regional hub between Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas.

Morocco's minister of transport and logistics, Abdessamad KAYOUH, reiterated the country's intention to increase the capacity of the Kingdom's airports from 38 million to 80 million passengers by 2030, and to increase Royal Air Maroc's fleet of aircraft from 50 to 200 by 2037.

Morocco also aims to become a major player in the sustainable development of air transport and in particular to seize opportunities regarding sustainable aviation fuel.

Increasing demand for SAF is encouraging investment in new production infrastructure. A protocol to support the development of green aviation fuel production in Morocco was signed at the Paris Air Show.

Morocco is constantly adapting to the shifting global landscape to remain competitive and resilient.

**Pictured above: The delegation promoted the kingdom's industrial ecosystem and boost the attractiveness of its aerospace sector.**

IMAGE: MINISTRE DU TRANSPORT ET DE LA LOGISTIQUE DU MAROC



A Royal Saudi Air Force Boeing F-15SA Eagle taxis out for a suppression of enemy air defences (SEAD) mission past the Qatari Air Force Typhoons.

Inset: This dual-seater Lockheed Martin F-16B MLU of the Royal Jordanian Air Force departs Konya Air Base for a mission, fitted with the Turkish SDT air combat manoeuvring instrumentation (ACMI) pod.

IMAGES: ALAN WARNES



# PLOY STORY

**Alan Warnes** travels to Konya Air Base, Turkey, to report on one of the biggest international tactical exercises in Europe.

**E**xercise 'Anatolian Eagle' is a big attraction for the air forces of Arab nations. They get the chance to work with NATO and vice-versa, to learn from each other in the biggest tactical training range in Europe.

This year (from June 23 to July 4) Konya Air Base in central Turkey hosted air forces from Jordan (three x Lockheed Martin F-16MLUs), Qatar (three x Eurofighter Typhoons) and Saudi Arabia (six x Boeing F-15SA Eagles).

They flew alongside assets from Azerbaijan (two Sukhoi Su-25 Frogfoots), Hungary (three Saab Gripens), NATO (one Boeing E-3A), USAF (12 F-16C/Ds) and numerous Turkish F-16s from several squadrons in the air war.

It was the first time the Hungarian Air Force had participated in AE since the international

exercise was founded in 2001. The Egyptian Air Force had been expected to send three F-16s, but unfortunately cancelled at the last minute, while the Pakistan Air Force was going to send six Chengdu Aircraft Corporation/Pakistan Aeronautical Complex JF-17 Block 3s but backed out after the outbreak of war in neighbouring Iran.



Nevertheless, the 30 international participants flying alongside 38 Turkish Air Force assets made up of 33 F-16s, three Boeing E-7T airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft, one CASA/IPTN CN 235 transport aircraft and a Boeing KC-135 tanker was enough to ensure a good fight.

For the first time in an international exercise, unmanned aerial vehicles were assigned direct strike missions – generally UAVs are used for surveillance missions in these exercises, but here Turkish Aerospace had introduced several examples, including an Anka, Akinci, Aksungur and stealthy-looking Anka 3 to air-to-ground sorties. Unfortunately, one of the two Anka 3s that were present was lost in an accident during the first week of the drills, but that didn't appear to cause any issues, although that side of the exercise was kept out of sight.

Many air forces and defence companies are now bidding to integrate UAVs with manned fighters in what is termed manned-unmanned teaming (MUM-T) or crewed-uncrewed teaming (CUC-T) to increase combat mass, at a fraction of the cost of buying and operating all manned fighters.

Turkey is one and Turkish Aerospace Industries (TUSAS) is among the companies leading the

**Continued  
on Page 18** ▶

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

way in the international arena, pairing UAVs with the future TAI Kaan fifth-generation fighter.

According to the exercise director Major Ekrem Cekin, this was actually being done at 'Anatolian Eagle' but it was difficult to find out any more detail on the specifics and if it did actually happen with, say, a Turkish Air Force F-16C, it was a big deal.

Cekin told the audience at the media briefing on July 3: "This represents one of the most advanced examples of manned-unmanned systems integration and showcases the technology-driven capabilities of the Turkish armed forces and Turkish industry."

These developments, he said, would not only reflect the scope of the exercise, but a vision for an air force, that is preparing for the operational environments of the future.

He added, "Anatolian Eagle is a product of joint training, shared understanding and collective deterrence."

Developments in the aggressive use of cruise and ballistic missiles, that we have witnessed during the Ukraine/Russia and Iran/Israel conflicts were understandably introduced into AE and will surely be implemented in every other half decent exercise.

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This led to jet-powered Turkish Aerospace Industries Simsek and Super Simsek UAS being flown in the ranges, but again we weren't told the exact specifics of how the scenario unfolded. But ground-based air defences on the massive Konya tactical range, like the Karasoj jammer, would have been involved. One scenario might have included fighters trying to shoot them down, but when the author asked which weapons were being used to do that, Major Cekin could only say 'the usual ones.'

Nevertheless, introducing the latest threats into such an exercise was a bold move by the 'Anatolian Eagle' planners, and hopefully in 'Anatolian Eagle 26' they might reveal more. We never saw any of the UAVs, which was probably a step too far for the Turkish Air Force.

All three Arab air forces flew multi-role missions, but the RSAF F-15SA Eagles also flew suppression of enemy air defence (SEAD) alongside the 31st Fighter Wing F-16Cs from Aviano Air Base. On the first Eagle composite air operations (COMAO) mission the author witnessed two F-15SAs and four USAF F-16Cs of the 30 international participants among the first to depart, alongside 152 Filo F-16Cs from the Turkish Air Force.

Their mission was to stop the Red Air ground-based air defences from 'shooting down' the Blue Air participants that included the Qatari Typhoons and Jordanian F-16s. The latter were fitted with ACMI pods, designed by Turkish company Substantive Defence Technology (SDT) and were quite distinctive fitted on the jets and Turkish Air Force F-16s. According to an

## REGION'S TROUBLES HINDER PARIS PRESENCE

Unfortunately, most Middle East military delegations cancelled their visits to the Paris Air Show because of the Israeli attacks on Iran and the latter's subsequent response. The region was on a heightened state of alert, and most senior personnel preferred to stay at home.

Nevertheless, there were at least two interesting news snippets.



**UAE WEAPONS ON SHOW:** Among the weapons on display in front of the Rafale B in the Dassault pavilion were three 500lb g (Mk82) Edge Halcon Systems P32 precision-guided munition (PGM) on an Aresia three-bomb adaptor pylon and to the left are two 500lb (Mk82) Edge Al Tariq PGMs.

Neither of the latter were labelled, in a bid to disguise their identities. All five are designed and built in the UAE and are being integrated onto the jet, in time for delivery of the first Dassault Rafales to the UAEAF&AD by 2028.

**UAE GLOBALEYE:** On the evening of June 18, France's defence procurement agency (DGA, Direction Générale de l'Armement) announced the Saab GlobalEye had been selected to replace the French Air Force's 30-year-old Boeing E-3F Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS). The requirement is for two GlobalEyes and an option for a further two and according to the DGA, the deal is "expected to be finalised in the coming months."

The UAEAF&AD is very happy with the operational capabilities of the four GlobalEyes it operates and has helped Saab to promote the new airborne early warning and control aircraft, as they are the only operator for now at least. Sweden has three on order for delivery within the next two years and will take the capability first and get the first aircraft to full capability later.

Micael Johansson, president and CEO of Saab said: "GlobalEye will enhance the French Armed Forces' situational awareness and threat detection across the air, land and sea domains. Our solution will enable France to maintain full sovereign control of its airborne early warning and control capability."



GlobalEye is an advanced multi-domain AEW&C solution with an array of active and passive sensors that provide long-range detection and identification of objects in the air, at sea and over land. By providing real-time information to air forces, armies and navies, GlobalEye enables enhanced situational awareness of the surrounding areas and early detection of threats.

SDT spokesman, the pods have a 200-mile radius range, and are an option to the more well known Cubic systems.

One important lesson for the Arab pilots, in a region where war is never far away, was the 'deterrence techniques aimed at stopping a surprise attack before conflict erupts'.

By the end of the two weeks of drills, 415 sorties had been flown, Qatar flew 23 missions, Jordan 16 and Saudi Arabia 50, providing pilots with invaluable experience to take home.

It is not lost on the Turkish Air Force or

Turkish aerospace defence companies that 'Anatolian Eagle' is an exercise where increasing numbers of indigenous Turkish systems can be introduced and marketed to participating air forces.

In 'Anatolian Eagle 26' we could even see the new Aselsan Hava Soj Global 6000 electronic attack aircraft being introduced – with the hangars already being constructed on base. More importantly it's an exercise that the Arab countries can participate alongside their Turkish and NATO colleagues to learn new tactical lessons. ▲



*As RoyalJet continues to focus on the customer experience and safety, CEO Shafiul Syed, said there are challenges in business aviation, predominantly the 'grey market.'* **Marcelle Nethersole reports.**

# RoyalJet plots a flightpath through the grey cloud

**S**hafiul Syed, chief executive officer (CEO) of VVIP business jet operator RoyalJet based in Abu Dhabi, sees the business aviation market as 'hugely buoyant with vast opportunities and incredible growth.'

However, Syed is concerned about the growth in the Gulf region having led to a proliferation of operators exerting downward pressure on prices – while not always being able to guarantee the same levels of quality.

"There are what we call 'grey market operators' out there, which don't have the same standards, so they can have lower costs," he explained. "An example is how we at RoyalJet, just like Emirates, Etihad and flydubai, send our pilots to a simulator twice a year for two days at a time.

"Some of those grey market operators don't do that level of training. They will take off, do a fly-by and then land, whereas with us, it's two days of training in which we will disorient the pilots so that they can train in recovering the aircraft. That's how important safety is to us.

"But this comes at a price, so we can't compete with the guy who doesn't do that level of training. So, I'm hoping that there is fairer competition, and the market can see this is what you get. I don't want it to be the other way around. I don't want something bad to happen and then people say, 'ah, we should have done this!'. I'd much rather have people actually open their eyes and see this is how it should be done."

Syed has been at the helm of RoyalJet since 2024, and has already made plenty of changes. Last year, the company ordered up to nine Airbus Corporate Jets (ACJ) ACJ320neos – quite a change from the Boeing Business Jet (BBJ) of which the company is the largest private operator in the world.

"We are in a unique place as

▼ We at RoyalJet, just like Emirates, Etihad and flydubai, send our pilots to a simulator twice a year for two days at a time. Some of those grey market operators don't do that level of training. ▲  
SHAFIUL SYED

we have slots secured for the first green aircraft by Q2 2026, which means another 18 months or so before we get the first aircraft interior done. So, by early 2028, we should see the first of the ACJs," he said.

"We are actually really lucky to have those slots – if you went to Airbus now, you would be looking at a slot six or seven years from now, unless you get cancellations.

"So, Airbus has honoured its relationship with us. This is the culmination of a 10-year process of evaluation. We've always looked at the competition, and Airbus has been pretty aggressive and dynamic in talking with us."

Syed did confirm the company 'are still very much a Boeing Business Jet (BBJ) operator.'

"We have up to nine BBJs with the latest one, the RJK, being very interesting with a lot of uptake. It can fly in four different configurations – 32 seats, 42 seats, 58 seats or 92 seats. It can also fly in a cargo configuration. We are already seeing great demand for this," he said.

□ □ □ □ □

While safety is a top priority, Syed is also keen on the customer experience. "Royal Jet is a royal service, so we serve VVIP customers, including the extended royal family. It is a good bit of our business, and we have built our fleet around that – all of our BBJs are what the royal family want to fly in.

"Due to the nature of our customers, we can fly to places other people can't get to and the Middle East is a great leverage for such destinations. Also, our FBO at Abu Dhabi is world class – something we are very proud of. Anything the customer desires, we can accommodate."

Digital transformation is also something Syed keeps an eye on. He hopes that technologies such as low-Earth orbit (LEO) satellites will bring down inflight connectivity costs. And, then, of course AI is a possibility.

"We have always used many digital services in our business, but that pace needs to accelerate faster and harder, so we look to enhance that. AI is not technology for the sake of technology. It needs to fit a purpose, and the purpose is always going to be set by human beings for now, at least," Syed said. ▲



Last year, the company ordered up to nine ACJ320neos – a change from its fleet of BBJs.

IMAGE: ROYALJET



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*Red Sea International Airport is on track to become one of the first carbon-neutral airports in the Middle East, powered solely by renewable energy.*

**Marcelle Nethersole** reports.

IMAGE: RSG



# A Sea change in development

**R**ed Sea Global (RSG) is the developer behind three luxury regenerative tourism destinations in Saudi Arabia – The Red Sea, AMAALA, and Thuwal Private Retreat – which are enhancing the Kingdom's tourism and sustainability offering as part of Vision 2030.

However, Abdulaziz Alabdan, executive director of airport operations at Red Sea Global, said RSG is 'more than just a developer'. "We are a visionary force spearheading a new era of regenerative tourism, proving that development can enhance the environment, uplift communities, and drive economic growth," he said.

At the heart of this all is Red Sea International Airport (RSI). Designed by Foster + Partners, it is inspired by the desert, oasis, and sea, with sustainability embedded in every aspect.

RSI first opened in 2023 for domestic flights from Riyadh and Jeddah via Saudia, and in 2024, it welcomed its first international flight from Dubai via flydubai. Flynas also connects domestically to Dammam.

"We're continuing to partner with leading carriers like Saudia, connecting RSI to major hubs across the Kingdom," said Alabdan.

Alabdan added that the RSI experience goes far beyond simply getting from point A to point B.

"It brings the private terminal experience to every traveller," he said. "We have crafted smaller, intimate spaces, shaded by cantilevered roof shells, and incorporated an internal green oasis to promote relaxation. Arrivals are met with a seamless transition to their chosen resort, with options ranging from a fleet of electric vehicles for a sustainable journey across the desert, to the ultimate luxury of Fly Red Sea seaplane transfers, charters, and scenic tours over the stunning Red Sea coastline."

RSI will be 100 per cent powered by renewable energy through the solar farm on site at The Red Sea.

"We have already deployed more than 760,000 photovoltaic solar panels, avoiding up to 600,000 tonnes of CO2 equivalent per year when fully operational," Alabdan explained.

"We're also incredibly proud to be the first airport in Saudi Arabia to offer sustainable aviation fuel (SAF),

reducing carbon emissions by up to 35 per cent per flight, marking a pivotal moment for the entire industry.

As the first seaplane company in Saudi Arabia, Fly Red Sea, our subsidiary air operator, demonstrated this commitment across all operations by exclusively using sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and lower-carbon aviation fuel (LCAF), for guest transfers and tours. We see RSI as a catalyst for change, inspiring other airports and industry stakeholders to adopt greener practices."

He added: "RSG is committed to knowledge sharing and collaboration, working with airlines and industry partners to accelerate the adoption of sustainable practices and create a more responsible aviation sector. Our partnership with Arabian Petroleum Supply Company (APSCO) was crucial in making these solutions accessible."



However, Alabdan admits that any 'groundbreaking projects' face its share of challenges, with one significant hurdle being the cost difference between SAF and conventional jet fuel.

"SAF is currently more expensive, but we're absorbing the initial cost difference as part of our commitment to sustainability," he explained. "We see this as an investment in the future of sustainable tourism, and we expect the price gap to narrow as SAF production scales up. This also links to the challenge of advocating the adoption of SAF by other airports or airlines. RSI is designed to minimise harm while actively regenerating the ecosystem."

He added: "By 2030, RSI will be a world-class hub, connecting the Red Sea region to destinations around the globe. We're attracting international investment and, crucially, creating opportunities for young Saudi talent," he said.

Its vocational training programme has already provided 629 employment opportunities at its destinations for successful graduates in various sectors such as airport services. RSI is a symbol of Saudi Arabia's ambition and its determination to create a brighter, more sustainable future for all."



**Abdulaziz Alabdan: "RSI brings the private terminal experience to every traveller."**

IMAGE: RSG



## AMMROC BOLSTERS ITS COLLABORATIONS IN AVIATION TRAINING AND MRO

AMMROC, the region's leading provider of military aviation MRO services, has signed several agreements to enhance human capital and align with global best practices in aviation training and workforce excellence.

AMMROC recently signed a strategic collaboration with the UAE, in line with the Emirati vision to advance the aviation sector driven by innovation and talent development.

Under this MoU, AMMROC will ensure that its engineering and technical teams receive specialised training tailored to industry needs. The framework will include global best practices in aviation maintenance and safety.



"This strategic collaboration between GCAA and AMMROC marks a significant step in advancing aviation training and capability development in the UAE", said Saif Mohammed Al Suwaidi, director general of the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority.

"This partnership reflects our commitment to fostering innovation, enhancing technical proficiency, and strengthening the UAE's position as a global leader in aviation excellence."



The agreement was signed by H.E Saif Mohammed Al Suwaidi, Director General of the UAE General Civil Aviation Authority and Jasem Al Marzooqi, CEO of AMMROC during their participation at IDEX 2025.

IMAGE: AMMROC

Jasem Al Marzooqi, CEO of AMMROC, on his part highlighted the strategic importance of this partnership. "At AMMROC, we recognise that the future of aviation excellence depends on continuous skills development and access to world-class training."

"By investing in cutting-edge training solutions, we are reinforcing the UAE's leadership in aviation maintenance and aerospace innovation."

Furthermore, the strategic alliance sealed between AMMROC and AELO Swiss Academy – powered by AeroLocarno (ASA) – marks a new era in aviation training and general aviation maintenance, driving industry growth in the UAE and beyond.

Finally, the MRO provider has signed a letter of intent with Safran Aircraft Engines, a key step in deepening their collaboration to enhance military engine MRO capabilities in the UAE. This partnership will focus on expanding local sustainment capacity, improving fleet readiness, and supporting a stronger, more self-reliant defence ecosystem.

By aligning Safran's global engine expertise with AMMROC's regional depth, both parties will deliver greater value to end-users and advance the UAE's aerospace and defence objectives.

These partnerships will support the UAE's long-term defence strategy, leveraging emerging technologies and procedures to enhance efficiency and elevate industry benchmarks. ▲

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**AVIATION WEEK**  
NETWORK

As the aviation industry navigates the ongoing global supply chain and manufacturing crisis, Flyadeal CEO Steve Greenway and Joramco CEO Fraser Currie offered their insights at an event organised by the Aviation Club UK. **Marcelle Nethersole** reports.

# AIRLINE FRACTURE

## HOW CAN WE RELIEVE THE SUPPLY PAIN?

**T**here is currently a backlog of 17,000 aircraft on order – double what it was compared with pre-pandemic levels. With current delivery rates it could take 14 years to fulfil that backlog.

There are 50,000 engines on unfulfilled orders, and 14 per cent of the global fleet are grounded.

Steve Greenway, CEO of Saudi's Flyadeal, said: "The engineering supply chain certainly provides challenges in the Middle East region.

"For example, we had two aircraft sitting in Toulouse for a couple of months without engines because CFM couldn't ship them fast enough."

A large part of Flyadeal services are for Hajj and Umrah customers on its widebody aircraft.

"The problem is, we can't get enough widebody aircraft, and we're an airline where we retire a widebody aircraft after 15 to 20 years," Greenway said.

□□□□□

So, who is really badly affected by this scenario?

"I think the pain is being felt by the airlines," said Fraser Currie, CEO of Jordanian MRO company Joramco.

"We've got aircraft that are coming in from lessors on lease return, and they're sitting for six months before we can even start, because they had to have their engines removed, sent out for refurbishment, and then we have to wait for them to come back. And that's just too long for an aircraft to be sat on the ground, particularly a narrowbody."

So how are airlines coming up with creative strategies to try to mitigate some of the impact?

Flyadeal recently signed an MoU to explore joint strategic commercial initiatives with Cebu Pacific.

"I was with Cebu Pacific's CEO Mike Szucs in the Philippines, and we worked out that his peak season was my low, and vice versa," explained Greenway.

"I currently have two of his

aircraft in the Kingdom covering aircraft that are on the ground. I think you'll see more of this happening as airlines are talking to each other," he said.

Greenway added that he has 'visibility until the end of summer'.

"We have to ship our engines from Saudi Arabia to Kuala Lumpur, and then ship them back. So, you're talking about time on the ground again.

"Aviation is a boom and bust industry, we can't deny that, but we haven't recovered from Covid yet, and then we have the war between Russia and Ukraine to contend with," he said.

"When I look at my supply chain, most of what I use is composite sheet metal for repairs. You know, a lot of that raw material is coming out of Russia, and the same volume is just not coming out. It's still having a major impact.

Greenway offered an example of the repair backlogs from a recent visit to London Heathrow Airport.

"If you're at Heathrow you can see a very forlorn-looking Saudi Boeing 787 sitting parked outside the cargo ramp, with a huge gash in the back where someone rammed it about a month ago.

"Boeing cannot even have a look at the aircraft until October at the earliest – that is the problem we are facing.

"We've just been notified by Airbus that our A321s, which are the first ones to get delivered in 2026, aren't even arriving next year – they're coming in 2027.

"And even then, they can't tell me when in 2027. I literally sit down with the fleet team a couple of times a week to try to figure out what we've got to operate in the next six to 12 months."

But Currie was keen to shed some positivity on the subject by saying Joramco does a lot to mitigate the problems and keep aircraft in the air.

"It's about having a relationship with your airline, where you pre-plan. We will get there," Currie vowed. ▲



"We've got aircraft that are coming in from lessors on lease return, and they're sitting for six months before we can even start."

FRASER CURRIE

"We've just been notified by Airbus that our A321s, which are the first ones to get delivered in 2026, aren't even arriving next year – they're coming in 2027."

STEVE GREENWAY





DAE CEO Firoz Tarapore is open to the idea of further acquisitions to boost the lessor's market presence. The company acquired fellow-lessor Nordic Air Capital earlier this year to increase its fleet of ATR turboprops.

IMAGES: DAE/ATR

# HAPPY DAE

*The latest consolidation in the aircraft leasing market has seen Dubai Aerospace Enterprise move up to the number three slot globally. But that ranking is largely irrelevant, CEO Firoz Tarapore told Alan Dron.*

**D**ubai Aerospace Enterprise (DAE) has become the world's third-largest aircraft lessor, with the acquisition of fellow leasing company Nordic Aviation Capital (NAC).

The enterprise value of the deal, completed in May, was approximately \$2 billion, DAE said.

DAE now has a fleet of around 750 owned, managed and committed aircraft. The owned and managed fleet of approximately 650 aircraft is on lease to 161 airlines in 74 countries.

DAE also has commitments to acquire approximately 100 aircraft from Boeing, Airbus, ATR, and trading counterparties.

DAE focuses on four different asset types, CEO Firoz Tarapore told *Arabian Aerospace* – narrowbodies from both Boeing and Airbus; one type of widebody from each of the manufacturers (Boeing 787-9 and Airbus A350-900); new-build Boeing 777F freighters; and the ATR 72-600 regional turboprop.

"The primary attraction to acquiring NAC was to increase our market position in the ATR 72-600 market space," Tarapore said. "Their portfolio consisted of asset types we wanted and asset types we didn't; the only way to get to the things we wanted was to buy everything. And then sell the asset types we didn't want."

With that in mind, DAE shortly afterwards disposed of a package of 75 aircraft. Fellow-lessor Azorra took 49 Embraer E-Jets, while approximately 25 out-of-production aircraft were sold to a financial investor with lease, asset and technical management services provided by DAE. The out-of-production types included De Havilland Canada Dash 8s and older models from the ATR range.

"Upon completion, the transactions announced today will reduce the weighted average age and increase the weighted average remaining lease term of DAE's passenger fleet," DAE said in a statement. "Once the aircraft involved

in the two deals are formally transferred to their new owners, DAE's fleet is expected to comprise 45 per cent Boeing aircraft, 42 per cent Airbus and 13 per cent ATR."

The deal marks the latest stage in the gradual consolidation of the leasing market, with several players having been swallowed up by larger companies in recent years.

"This transaction augments our position as a global leader in aircraft leasing and enhances our ability to offer more cost-effective solutions to our current and prospective clients," Tarapore said, adding the transaction also offers DAE the opportunity to deepen its relationship with the aircraft manufacturers across a broader range of aircraft types.

However, he added, the company's new position as the world's third-largest by count was largely unimportant: "We don't normally think about life in those terms."

"We don't wake up every day and say 'We want to be number one or number two, or three. We think: 'What actions can we take today to enhance our market position in the segments in which we've chosen to participate?'"

Asked if DAE was still in the market for further acquisitions, Tarapore said: "The short answer is yes."

The Dubai-based company has made other purchases, such as AWAS, with \$8.5 billion of assets in 2017 over the years and "I don't see that changing. If we see an opportunity to grow inorganically to boost our strategic presence, we would definitely do that."

Tarapore expects that the continuing disparity in supply and demand in the airliner industry will mean the continued strength of the leasing market over the next few years: "Airlines continue to need product at a pace that's higher than what the OEMs are able to produce at the moment. As a consequence, the leasing market is still quite strong, in terms of both the valuations of the aircraft themselves and the monthly lease rates they command." ▲

▼ **This transaction augments our position as a global leader in aircraft leasing and enhances our ability to offer more cost-effective solutions to our current and prospective clients. ▲**  
FIROZ TARAPORE

# UAE diabetes study heads into orbit

A UAE-led medical study recently headed into space aboard Axiom Mission 4.

The private mission, which launched on June 25, was led by veteran astronaut Peggy Whitson, adding to her standing record for the longest cumulative time in space by an American astronaut.

Research by Abu Dhabi's Burjeel Hospital and Houston-based Axiom Space was carried out as part of the mission after it launched from a Florida spaceport.

The research study focused on supporting astronauts with insulin-dependent diabetes during short-duration missions, demonstrating accurate blood glucose monitoring, data transmission, and insulin viability in microgravity.

The findings could improve remote diabetes management and



telemedicine capabilities on Earth, benefiting a wider population according to Axiom Space.

The Axiom 4 launch was originally scheduled for June 12 but was delayed so that NASA and Roscosmos

could understand the most recent repair efforts to seal small leaks on the ISS.

The leaks, located in the aft (back) most segment of the International Space Station's Zvezda service module, have been

monitored by flight controllers for the past few years.

■ The crew of the Axiom Mission 4 mission to the ISS is pictured here.

From left to right, pilot

Shubhanshu Shukla from India, commander Peggy Whitson from the U.S., and mission specialists Slawosz Uznanski from Poland and Tibor Kapu from Hungary. ▲

## EMIRATI TO WIN FREE TRIP ABOARD VIRGIN GALACTIC

Aabar Investments has announced a competition for an Emirati to win a free trip aboard Virgin Galactic's spaceship when it begins carrying paying tourists on suborbital trips.

Contest details have yet to be worked out, but it appears that expatriates, who far outnumber the local Emirati population, are not eligible.

Virgin Galactic has yet to set a firm start date to begin taking paying passengers on its suborbital flights. Aabar is a partial owner of the company along with Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Group. ▲

## UAE and South Africa partner on satellite

The UAE and South Africa are to partner on a joint project for a dedicated South African satellite.

Mondli Gungubele, deputy minister of communications and digital transformation of the Republic of South Africa, said the initiative will leverage the UAE's advancements in satellite technology.

Gungubele added: "The vice president accompanied me to the SAMENA Leaders' Summit 2025 to accelerate the pace of this partnership. We have also signed a memorandum of understanding and look forward to advancing it to a more advanced implementation stage."

Gungubele commended the UAE's development experience, describing it as a global leading model in progress and prosperity.

"Through my repeated visits, I see that the UAE rivals first-world countries in its advanced infrastructure and vital sectors such as transportation, communications, hospitality, and urban development.

"This achievement proves that progress is not tied to colour or background, but rather to will, commitment, and hard work," he said.

This development builds upon South Africa's presence in the satellite development industry. The country has launched 12 satellites into orbit and has embarked on several future satellite development projects. ▲

## UAESA SIGNS AGREEMENT FOR EXPLORER LAUNCH

The UAE Space Agency and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries have signed an agreement to provide services for the launch of the "Mohammed Bin Rashid Explorer" spacecraft aboard an H3 launch vehicle in 2028.

The MBR Explorer is a space probe designed to travel to seven different main belt asteroids. The Emirates Mission to the Asteroid Belt will visit asteroids 10253 Westewald, 623 Chimaera, 13294 Rockox, (88055) 2000 VA28, (23871) 1998 RC76, and (59980) 1999 SG6, in a five billion kilometre total journey. It will also attempt to land on its seventh and final asteroid, 269 Justitia in 2034. ▲

## Arab satellite 813 passes system review

Arab Satellite 813 has successfully concluded its system integration review (SIR), a pivotal milestone in the satellite's lifecycle. This means the satellite can proceed to the final stages of environmental testing.

The Arab Satellite 813 project is for an advanced earth observation satellite which is intended to monitor earth, environment and climate.

The programme will develop a spacecraft to host a hyperspectral optical instrument.

The name Satellite 813 refers to the date that marked the beginning of prosperity for the House of Wisdom in Baghdad under the reign of Al-Ma'mun. ▲



High flyers: Visitors can also look forward to the famous flying display.

IMAGE: TARSUS



# TICKET TO THE FUTURE

With a refreshed format and a sharp focus on innovation, sustainability, and next-generation technology, this year's Dubai Airshow is raising the bar. **Marcelle Nethersole** finds out what visitors can expect.

**T**he Dubai Airshow will return for its 19th edition from November 17–21, 2025 at Dubai World Central (DWC), promising its most ambitious edition yet.

Visitors will experience the latest advancements across commercial aviation, defence, space, and advanced air mobility (AAM).

Under its rebranded theme “The Future is Here” – this year's show will bring together more than 1,400 global exhibitors in a newly-expanded 8,000sqm exhibition hall, with more than 493 confirmed military and civil delegations.

It will also feature a significantly-expanded conference programme offering 12 curated tracks – including six new tracks – across four dedicated stages. The conference will welcome more than 350 expert speakers for over 90 hours of live content, covering major trends and challenges in the industry.

A core focus of this year's show will be space, reflecting the UAE's ambition to drive innovation and economic development through exploration and technology.

“In partnership and collaboration with the UAE Space Agency, we will deliver the most expansive space programme in the airshow's history,” said Tim Hawes, managing director of Informa Markets. “A two-day conference will cover topics such as sustainability, security, and commercialisation, while there will also

be a dedicated space pavilion. The space programme will include high-profile delegation visits, space asset displays, international space agencies, start-up competitions and investor meetings, making the Dubai Airshow a strategic platform to accelerate the growth of the space industry,” he said.

Astronaut engagement will also play a central role across the five-day event, with accomplished past and current astronauts participating in the event programme.

His excellency Salem Butti Salem Al Qubaisi, director general at the UAE Space Agency, added: “The Dubai Airshow 2025 today represents a vital strategic platform for the development of the national space sector. It offers a unique opportunity to showcase national capabilities and advanced technologies that enable us to strengthen our global presence in this vital field.

“The space steering committee goes beyond the concept of traditional exhibitions to create a truly-interactive platform that embodies the National Space Strategy by translating it into practical programmes and projects that support national initiatives in achieving the economic goals of the ‘We the UAE 2031’ vision, and the new economic model adopted by the UAE.”

Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) will also be a hot topic during the event as the UAE continues to make clear strides in the sector, with strong investment in infrastructure, regulatory approvals, and successful early test flights demonstrating real progress.

**His excellency Salem Butti Salem Al Qubaisi:**  
“The show offers a unique opportunity to showcase national capabilities and advanced technologies.”

IMAGE: UAE SPACE AGENCY

Continued  
on Page 28



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

“With regulation and investment advancing quickly, Dubai is positioning itself as a true global leader in AAM and our 19th edition will reflect and showcase that leadership,” said Hawes.

“For the first time in the show’s history, eVTOL aircraft will feature in the daily flying display, showcasing their capabilities. On the exhibition floor, a dedicated AAM pavilion will highlight the latest innovations from companies leading next-generation air mobility. The programme will also feature thought leadership panels and regulatory discussions highlighting Dubai’s ambition to lead in AAM, focusing on infrastructure roll-out, vertiport development and the steps needed to bring AAM solutions to market.”

Advancements in technology underscore all sectors within aviation, and one familiar company that will be exhibiting its latest capabilities at the show is Thales which, symbolically, is this year marking 50 years of operations in the UAE, as it continues to support the UAE and the region.



Pascale Sourisse, president and CEO, Thales International, said: “In partnership with Tawazun Council, Thales Emarat Technologies has recently launched a cutting-edge factory to build ground master air surveillance and air defence radars. Scheduled to become operational in 2027, this facility will help strengthen the UAE’s defence manufacturing landscape and serve as a vital national asset.

“We’ve also partnered with EDGE in the UAE to localise the maintenance of Thales’ advanced optronic systems, further supporting sovereign readiness for the UAE armed forces.”

Sourisse said the company’s growth is also driving investments in Emirati talent.

“With a workforce of more than 170 professionals – and plans to double this number in the near future – we are dedicated not only to advancing the nation’s technological edge, but also to fostering human capital, in alignment with the UAE’s national vision,” she said.

Beyond the UAE, in Saudi Arabia, the company is partnering with Matarat Holding to transform airport operations with digital solutions that enhance passenger experiences across the Kingdom.

“We support Qatar Airways through a renewed partnership to power their next-generation inflight entertainment systems and establish a dedicated IFE service and maintenance centre in Doha. And in Oman, we support the royal armed forces with secure



**A two-day conference will cover topics such as sustainability, security, and commercialisation.**

IMAGE: TARSSUS

communications, radars, avionics and optronics and also supplying IFE solutions to Oman Air.”

Sourisse added that this year’s Dubai Airshow will be a platform for the company to showcase its capabilities in artificial intelligence (AI).

“Investing 20 per cent of our annual revenues in R&D, we will place a particular focus on AI, and how it contributes to building a more sovereign space, more connected civil aviation and more collaborative defence systems,” she said.

“Artificial intelligence is not just a future concept for us. It is already integrated into more than 100 Thales products and solutions. Events like the Dubai Airshow enable us to better understand our customers and partners’ evolving needs, explore collaboration opportunities, and co-develop solutions that are both technologically advanced and operationally relevant.”

For the first time, the show will extend into the evening with dedicated night-time sessions called ‘Airshow After Dark.’

“This twilight experience will keep the event alive later into the evening, until 9pm on day two, with networking receptions, live entertainment under the stars, a drone show and special performances by the floodlit static display,” explained Hawes.

“Meanwhile, the inaugural ‘Party on the Runway’ will be among this year’s most exciting additions. An unmissable evening of corporate networking at Skydive Dubai will bring the global aerospace industry together in a truly immersive setting, complete with live DJ sets and premium hospitality.”

Other new features for this year include the Aerospace Executive Club, connecting

C-suite leaders to discuss industry trends and strategic collaboration opportunities, as well as the airlines and airports keynote hosted by Dubai Airports, where strategic discussions between global airline and airport leaders will take place.

“As part of the expanded exhibition space, start-ups and future tech will be part of the Inspiration Zone. This year will also welcome the academy – with tracks dedicated to training, cybersecurity, airport tech, and future flight: powered by women – designed to equip talent with the skills and mentorship needed, as well as the Wellness Zone, set to help visitors recharge and restore balance amidst the hustle and bustle of the busy show,” said Hawes.



This year’s static display will feature more than 200 aircraft on display.

Visitors can also look forward to the famous flying display. While the line-up is yet to be confirmed at time of press, Hawes said visitors can expect ‘an exciting mix’ of international aerobatic teams, military formation flights and tactical displays, and commercial aircraft demonstrations that highlight the very best of the industry. eVTOL fly-bys will also be a landmark addition, showcasing next-generation urban air vehicles.

Skyview also returns for 2025 and is expected to welcome more than 15,000 visitors across five days. With a brand-new format open to families, aerospace enthusiasts, and students, it will offer interactive exhibits, and STEM activations.

“The Dubai Airshow 2025 isn’t just returning, it’s set to be a defining event for the future of global aerospace and defence industries,” said Hawes. ▲



**Pascale Sourisse:** “We are dedicated not only to advancing the nation’s technological edge, but also to fostering human capital, in alignment with the UAE’s national vision.”

IMAGE: THALES





# SAUDIA HAND IN HAND WITH ESG

*Saudia Group's first vice-president of sustainability, Maryam Telmesani, explained the significance of its upcoming group-wide sustainability report and advocating for a pragmatic fuel strategy. Graham Dunn reports from Jeddah.*

**S**audia Group is set to publish its first sustainability report by the end of this year, marking a key milestone in embedding ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) principles across the company and its operating units.

Speaking to *Arabian Aerospace* during the IATA MENA Aviation Day in Jeddah in May, Saudia Group vice-president of sustainability, Maryam Telmesani, said it will report based on the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards covering sustainability criteria.

"We want everything we say to be very measurable," she said. "Our aim is to publish our first group-wide report by the end of this year."

Telmesani views Saudia Group's upcoming sustainability report not only as a disclosure exercise, but as a catalyst for a shift in mindset and to build stakeholder trust.

"This report is not just for compliance," she said. "It's to hold ourselves accountable – internally and externally – and to benchmark our progress across the group."

She described Saudia Group's approach to

sustainability as "holistic and balanced", built around three pillars: people, the planet and prosperity.

This aligns with Saudi Arabia's wide-ranging Vision 2030 diversification and transformation roadmap. "If you look into the details of Vision 2030, sustainability is not an add-on — it is central to how the Kingdom is reshaping its economy and society," Telmesani said.

She said Saudia Group's role in Vision 2030 includes decarbonising aviation operations, contributing to local sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and other alternatives development, alongside initiatives to enhance social diversity, equity and inclusion, and to promote innovation and circularity.

Since her appointment in 2024 as Saudia Group's first vice-president of sustainability, Telmesani has led an assessment to identify existing initiatives across its operations.

"One of our early achievements is internal alignment," she said. "Sustainability cannot sit in a silo. It must be integrated into day-to-day thinking, operations and leadership KPIs."

**Continued  
on Page 30**

▼ We need to think differently to deliver meaningful impact. ▲

MARYAM TELMESANI



#### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

“We are now working closely with every company of our group and the operational units within the group to build their own sustainability roadmaps — while also identifying shared priorities across the group.”

Telmesani also pointed to the importance of innovation. “Sustainability and innovation go hand in hand,” she explained. “We need to think differently to deliver meaningful impact.”

That spirit of innovation has been evident in SkyTeam’s annual Aviation Challenge, an initiative which provides an opportunity for alliance members to develop and share ideas around more sustainable operations. Notably, airline unit Saudia was in 2024 recognised as being the alliance member to have made the most progress in adopting Aviation Challenge sustainable solutions.

#### Fuel strategy

Saudia Group is also contributing to the Kingdom’s aviation fuel transformation with local SAF, eSAF, and low-carbon aviation fuel (LCAF).

LCAF uses conventional kerosene infrastructure, but has lower lifecycle carbon intensity through improved production methods. While global SAF

availability remains limited, the group is advocating for recognition of LCAF as a transitional and scalable solution for regions like the Middle East.

“If there’s an alternative that exists, is available at scale, and can deliver emissions reductions now — why not use it?” Telmesani asked. “We’ve seen the delay curve with SAF. To build a sustainable aviation industry, we must be open to practical and science-based alternatives.”

She emphasised that while Saudia complies with the recently implemented European SAF mandates, the group’s position is to champion solutions that “reflect regional realities and advantages”.

“It’s not about rejecting regulation. It’s about complementing it with regional pathways that are faster, affordable and viable for broader adoption,” she said.

Saudi Arabia has a net-zero target by 2060, which she said means that offsetting, clean energy diversification, and regional research and developments partnerships will all play a role in the pathway forward.

“As the Kingdom advances toward its net-zero ambition,” Telmesani concluded, “Saudia Group is committed to being a proactive enabler of a more sustainable, inclusive, and innovative aviation ecosystem — both regionally and globally.” ▲

▼ If there’s an alternative that exists, is available at scale, and can deliver emissions reductions now — why not use it? ▲

MARYAM TELMESANI

*IATA is urging greater co-operation within the fast-developing Middle East to ensure “no country is left behind” in aviation’s growth story.*

**Graham Dunn reports.**

Speaking at the IATA Aviation Day Middle East North Africa event in Jeddah during May, the airline association’s senior vice-president, operations, safety and security, Nick Careen, flagged the above-average air transport growth expected in the region over the next 20 years; 4.8 per cent average annual traffic growth in the Middle East compared with a wider industry rate of 3.3 per cent.

“But we also need to face a reality that’s difficult for some to accept: the region is not developing evenly,” said Careen.

“The region has already proven that bold vision and strategic investment can yield extraordinary results. Now is the time to extend that spirit of co-operation beyond borders — to create partnerships that deliver benefits not just to individual states, but to the entire region.”

#### Integrated approach

Alongside geopolitical instability, Careen highlights fragmentation and the lack of a harmonised aviation market as impeding connectivity in the region — particularly for smaller states and markets. He noted that some small or lower-income countries in the Middle East have struggled with limited local demand, constrained resources and business models that cannot match the economies of scale of the super-connector airlines.

IATA is therefore calling for a more integrated approach within the region, identifying opportunities around harmonising airspace and regulations, a collective push on sustainable aviation and increased knowledge sharing.

“A Middle East united by open skies, harmonised regulations, and shared innovation would be even more competitive, more resilient, and deliver even more economic and social benefits for people,” Careen said. “And it would ensure that no country is left behind in aviation’s growth story.”

Notably, Careen believes Saudia Arabia can play a strong role in this, especially given the ambitious growth developments in the Kingdom in line with its Vision 2030 diversification strategy.



# IATA URGES CO-OPERATION TO SPREAD GROWTH BENEFITS



▼ A Middle East united by open skies, harmonised regulations, and shared innovation would be even more competitive, more resilient, and deliver even more economic and social benefits for people. ▲

NICK CAREEN

During the event IATA announced several training agreements with Saudi airlines, airports, and academic institutions to address skills needed to support the Kingdom's growing aviation sector.

"When we talk about things that need to be focused on, like collaboration on global standards, Saudi plays a big role in that because they are open to it," Careen said, noting the association does quite a lot of work with Saudi Arabia. "It is important, because whatever happens here potentially could be leveraged out to other nations within the Middle East."

In a keynote address at the event, president of Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA), Abdulaziz Al-Duailej, said that by

investing and working together the region can lead the "next era" of global aviation. "Saudi Arabia, through GACA, stands ready to partner, collaborate and drive this shared future," he said.

Al-Duailej underscored the progress and contribution aviation has already made, both in the region and Saudi Arabia.

"We are seeing tangible results," he said. "By 2024 passenger traffic across the Middle East exceeded pre-pandemic levels by nine per cent, more than double the global growth rate, while Saudia Arabia's civil aviation sector recorded a remarkable increase of more than 24 per cent compared to pre-pandemic."

Growth in Saudi Arabia comes amid

major investment in the sector in line with the Kingdom's Vision 2030 growth and transformation targets.

"At a national level, Saudi Arabia is delivering on the aviation side, not only through ambition, but through concrete actions," he said. "As a strategic regulator, GACA's mission is to enable growth, foster competition and ensure better services for passengers."

Passengers traveling through Saudi airports in 2024 increased 15 per cent in exceeding 128 million, while air cargo volumes topped 1.2 million tonnes.

## Airport expansion

One key element to facilitate Saudi Arabia's growth ambitions is developing airport infrastructure to meet future growth. This has already seen the new Red Sea International airport open in 2023 as well as new airport and expansion projects under way across a string of Saudi facilities. This includes the major new hub for Riyadh, King Salman International airport.

For Careen at IATA, one of the key aspects is to ensure new airport infrastructure is built for purpose and he is encouraged by the approach in Saudi Arabia. "They are not looking to overbuild. They are looking to do what's right. And capacity building is something that is really important – not only within Saudi, but within the Middle East in general.

"When you build these things, someone has to pay for it. And it is often us [airlines]," he said. "So, let's make sure we have a sound cost-recovery mechanism. Airlines never balk at paying. When we balk is when we pay too much."

He also sees an opportunity for airport design to reflect new technology and processes. "Don't build it like it used to be," Careen said, noting as an example, how the advanced use of biometrics could change the security experience and requirements within an airport.

"If you take down those walls and barriers, what does that airport look like? Far different than it is today.

"So those are the conversations that we have, not only with Saudis, but with many countries that are looking at greenfield opportunities." ▲

IMAGE: IATA

*IATA held its 81st annual general meeting and air transport summit in New Delhi from June 1-3, the first time in 42 years that India has hosted the world's most prestigious airline gathering.*

**Mark Pilling** was there.

# NEW INDIA RISING

MODI: WE HAVE THE MARKET, DEMOGRAPHY AND TALENT, PLUS AN OPEN AND SUPPORTIVE POLICY ECOSYSTEM FOR INDUSTRY

**I**ndia is putting the rise of its blossoming aviation industry at the centre of its economic growth story, prime minister Narendra Modi told a packed room at IATA's 81st AGM.

"Today's India is filled with greater self-confidence than ever before. We are not only a vast market in the global aviation ecosystem, but also a symbol of policy leadership, innovation, and inclusive development," said Modi in a wide-ranging speech covering multiple aspects of India's aviation ecosystem.

It was a major coup for an IATA annual gathering to be addressed by the leader of a major global economy, underlining the importance India places on the air transport sector as traveller numbers soar, airlines strive to make international strides with huge aircraft orders and new airports open at pace.

□□□□□

Modi stressed that: "The aviation sector is poised to become a centre of major transformation and innovation in the times ahead. India is fully prepared for all these possibilities.

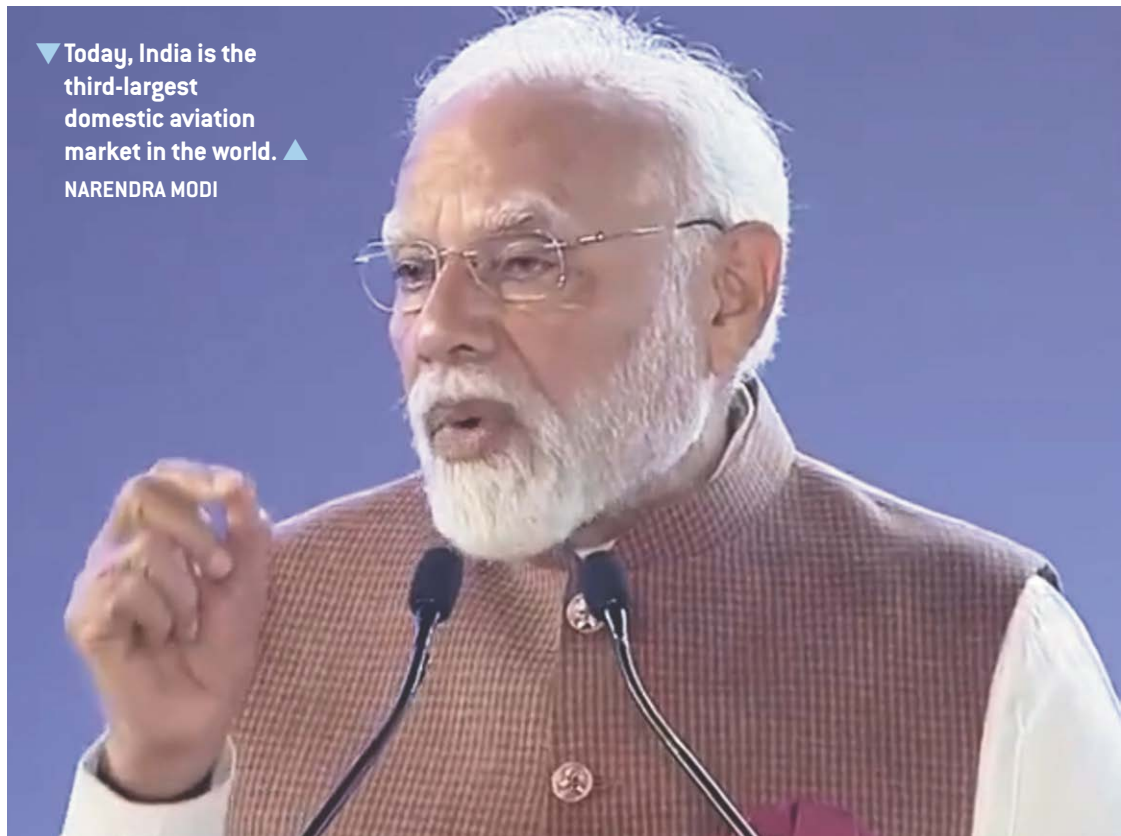
"I say this on the basis of three strong pillars that India possesses. Firstly, India has the market – and this market is not just a group of consumers; it reflects the aspirations of a dynamic and ambitious society of India.

"Secondly, we have the demography and talent for technology and innovation – our youth are the new-age innovators, who are driving breakthroughs in fields like artificial intelligence, robotics, and clean energy.

"Thirdly, we have an open and supportive policy ecosystem for industry. With the strength of these three capabilities, we must work together to take

▼ Today, India is the third-largest domestic aviation market in the world. ▲

NARENDRA MODI



India's aviation sector to new heights.

"In recent years, India has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in the field of civil aviation," said Modi. "Today, India is the third-largest domestic aviation market in the world.

"The success of our UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) scheme is a golden chapter in Indian civil aviation. Under this scheme, more than 15 million passengers have availed themselves of affordable air travel, and many citizens were able to fly for the very first time."

He outlined the investment India is

making in new airports. "These are not just numbers – they are a glimpse into the potential of a 'New India'. We are investing in world-class airport infrastructure," explained Modi, with the country growing from 74 operational airports in 2014 to 162 today.

"India's aviation sector is standing at a take-off point from where it is ready to soar to great heights. And this journey will not just cross geographical boundaries, but will also lead the world towards sustainability, green mobility, and equitable access." ▲





MC'S HAMMER:  
IATA director  
general Willie  
Walsh hands over  
the ceremonial  
AGM gavel to the  
event's host and  
IATA board chair  
Pieter Elbers, the  
CEO of IndiGo.

IMAGE: IATA

## Air industry faces up to major challenges

The spectre of trade tariffs, continuing supply chain woes impacting aircraft deliveries and worries about pitiful sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) production, were high on IATA's agenda in Delhi.

These are all major issues for the air transport industry, but events in the following days brought others to the fore for a sector seemingly never too far from a crisis.

The IATA meeting, which was a celebration of India's fast-developing aviation industry, came just days before the fatal crash of AI171 on June 12 at Ahmedabad Airport.

This was closely followed by the Iran-Israel conflict, which included Iran retaliating to the US bombing of Iranian nuclear sites by firing missiles at a US military base in Qatar, leading to airport closures at Gulf hubs and several days of huge traveller disruption.

These events would have lent a different tone to IATA if the timing had been different, but in his state of the nation address, IATA director general Willie Walsh issued a clear warning about the negative consequences of trade barriers and tariffs.

"Like all forms of connectivity, flying makes the world more prosperous," said Walsh. "That stands in contrast to isolationism, trade barriers and the fragmentation of the multi-lateral rules-based system. These destroy wealth and lower living standards. For the times we live in, this is an important message."



Airlines are going to be impacted by a slowing global economy as many players take a wait-and-see attitude as trade conflicts are playing out, experts warned. There is a lot of 'holding your breath' as the global economy starts to slow down.

"The uncertainty and quick changes of U.S. trade policy creates a paralysis," Henry Wilkinson, chief intelligence officer at Dragonfly, said.

Separately, IATA urged the industry to accelerate sustainability efforts as the roll-out of sustainable aviation fuels (SAF), air traffic control and fleet modernisation have been falling behind.

"By the time we meet next year, we must be able to show more progress," Walsh said. "And by 'we', I mean all the aviation industry and governments who are joined in a common commitment to net zero by 2050."

SAF production is expected to double to two million tonnes in 2025, but that represents only 0.7 per cent of fuel demand. Walsh criticised that governments are not creating "supportive policy frameworks", that U.S. tax credits that were supposed to support production ramp-up "are now uncertain" and that major energy companies such as Shell and BP have cut back on investment plans.

Walsh also blasted manufacturers and the supply chain for constant delays.

"The manufacturing sector is failing badly", he said. Deliveries are down 26 per cent this year versus prior promises, 1,100 aircraft under 10 years old are in storage and lead times between order and delivery cannot be 14 years.

"It is just not acceptable that it should take until the end of the decade" for supply chain issues to be sorted out, stated Walsh. ▲

## BLOCKED FUNDS ISSUE PERSISTS

States in Africa and the Middle East (AME) make up 85 per cent of the \$1.3bn in airline funds blocked for payment by governments, said Kamil Al-Awadhi regional vice president Africa and the Middle East at IATA.

The scale of the blocked funds issue in AME remains the same as a year ago, making it “still a big issue”, he explained. The difference is that the amounts owed are spread among several countries rather than the \$850m at its peak blocked by Nigeria in 2023-4. This has since been cleared.

As of April, IATA logged \$1.28bn in blocked funds, globally down from \$1.7bn in October 2024. However, of this \$1.1bn is in AME, a number that has not changed since October.

The top blocked funds offenders are Mozambique at \$205m; XAF Zone (several states in West Africa) \$191m; Algeria \$178m; Lebanon \$142m; Bangladesh \$92m; Angola \$84m; Pakistan \$83m; Eritrea \$76m; Zimbabwe \$68m; and Ethiopia \$44m.

In total there are 29 countries in AME with blocked funds, said IATA.



IATA is constantly working on the blocked funds issue in AME, as it did in close co-operation with the Nigeria authorities to eradicate its debt. “If a country admits it has a problem, if they don't have dollars, we work with them to try to find solutions to reduce them [blocked funds] over a certain time,” said Al-Awadhi.

“But when you have a country that has

**Kamil Al-Awadhi:**  
In the Middle East  
“aviation is not  
developing  
evenly”.  
IMAGE IATA

it all [the money] but denies it to the point where they have meetings in Parliament saying, ‘shall we just wipe out the millions from the airlines and walk away’ then you start getting angry,” he explained.

In the Middle East “aviation is not developing evenly”, said Al-Awadhi. Geopolitical instability has been commonplace in the past three-four years, bringing operational constraints and pushing up costs, while there are stark economic disparities between the successful states and the struggling ones.

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Al-Awadhi expanded on the issue of country sanctions noting that out of the 67 countries he covers in the AME region, 21 are under sanction.

There are also 12 conflicts on-going in this region, he added. “This makes the region sometimes complicated to operate in, it has a negative impact on the industry and definitely on the airlines,” he said.

One of IATA's Middle East region priorities is to support the reintegration of states emerging from sanctions. For example, now that sanctions on Syria have been lifted, as of February 2025 by both the European Union and the US, IATA stands ready to help the country's aviation entities rebuild. ▲

## Supply chain woes impact region's growth

Airline leaders in the Middle East point to an all-embracing impact of continued supply chain issues as one of the biggest challenges they are facing today.

During a wide-ranging panel session at IATA's Aviation Day Middle East North Africa (see page 29), the chief executives of carriers in the region laid bare the extent to which the supply chain challenges, which have plagued the industry since the pandemic, are impacting their day-to-day business.

Steven Greenway, CEO of Saudi Arabian low-cost carrier Flyadeal, does not hold out hope for a quick resolution to supply chain issues. “This is with us for the next three-to-five years, minimum,” he said.

Adrian Hamilton-Manns, chief executive of Omani low-cost carrier SalamAir, agreed and pointed to the challenge it creates, particularly for carriers that are looking to grow. SalamAir is looking to add 10 more Airbus A320s as it continues on a revamp which has seen it focus back on its core low-cost narrowbody operations.

“We need to get bigger quicker. But we are not going to be able to do that for three or four years,” he said, citing aircraft availability challenges. He noted this inability to ramp up quickly creates issues in meeting the wider strategic goals of states in the region. Oman, like Saudi Arabia, has a transformation and economic diversification strategy, Vision 2040, of which tourism is a key pillar.

A shortage of aircraft prompted Oman's civil aviation regulator to temporarily open up the market to foreign operators to fly domestic services during the summer peak.

“That's not a reflection of SalamAir's abilities to carry passengers, or Oman Air's,” Hamilton-Manns explained, saying it's a reflection of manufacturing not giving airlines what they need. ▲

■ See Supply chain pain - Page 24.

## IATA COMMITTED TO NET ZERO 2050 TARGET

Despite deep concerns about the availability, cost and lack of government support for sustainable aviation fuels (SAF), IATA and its member airlines have not used the association's 81st annual general meeting in Delhi to discuss delaying the 2050 target date to achieve net zero carbon emissions, IATA head Willie Walsh told media at the closing press conference.

“I think all of the panel discussions were acknowledging that this is not something we can ignore, but I think there is great concern that we're not making sufficient progress, not as airlines, but as the value chain that needs to support the airlines transitioning to net zero in 2050, and that's the reason we're calling it out,” explained Walsh.

“We clearly want to see more coordinated action on the part of governments. I think we're not being helped by countries and regions with mandates without accompanying incentives to stimulate production.

“I think we've been able to demonstrate that mandates have not done anything to

promote the additional production of SAF, but have merely added additional costs,” continued Walsh.

“With no environmental benefit, and that's a great concern to all the [airline] CEOs, I think we're also concerned that a number of the key players who have said nice words about net zero in 2050 aren't matching those words with actions.”

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During the AGM, IATA had heavily criticised the oil majors for reining back on investing in the energy transition and cutting back their SAF production plans.

“We have made clear from the very beginning that the airline industry will not be able to achieve net zero in 2050 unless everybody in the wider value chain supports the industry in doing that.

“I've used the phrase ‘sounding the alarm’. I think it is a wake-up call,” he stressed. “We still have time to get there, but we do need to see more action on the parts of all of the partners in the value chain to make sure that the industry can get there.” ▲



IMAGE: AIRBUS



*The 2025 edition of the Paris Airshow in late June only saw modest orders placed, with Saudi Arabian firms to the fore.*

## Saudi players shine in Paris

**T**he major aircraft deals revealed in the run up to Paris by Qatar Airways and Etihad, plus Boeing opting not to announce any deals in the wake of the fatal crash of an Air India 787 just days before the show, meant the biennial industry showcase was always going to be quiet on the order front.

The main action was dominated by Saudi Arabian lessor Avilease and newcomer airline Riyadh Air.

Avilease became a new Airbus customer at Paris ordering 10 firm A350F freighters and 30 A320neo family aircraft.

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The deal includes 12 A350F options and a further 25 A320neo options. The delivery of both models begins in 2030 and continues through 2033.

Citing a “very hard fought” battle between the Airbus A350F and Boeing’s 777F for its order, Edward O’Byrne, CEO of Avilease, said the payload-range combination of the A350F offered the most favourable package for its likely

customer base over the larger Boeing freighter.

Avilease, which is wholly owned by the Kingdom’s public investment fund, has grown to a managed fleet of almost 200 aircraft in just three years of operation as it strives to execute on its mission to become a top 10 global aircraft lessor by 2030, explained O’Byrne.

Being a top 10 lessor “basically means around a \$20bn balance sheet by the end of the decade,” he told reporters.

“We are about two years ahead of schedule, mostly thanks to the acquisition of Standard Chartered (SC),” he added.

Avilease concluded the deal to buy the SC aircraft leasing business in November 2023, which accelerated its fleet growth. “Scale equals value in our business,” said O’Byrne.

The second big deal saw Riyadh Air placing an order for 25 Airbus A350-1000s with options for another 25.

The order took Riyadh Air’s order book up to 182 aircraft on order and it will operate a three-type fleet with flights set to commence later in 2025.

“Riyadh Air is making significant

progress as we move towards our first flight later this year and agreeing this deal for up to 50 Airbus A350-1000 aircraft is an important statement of intent,” said Riyadh Air CEO Tony Douglas.

“Already in 2025, we have received our AOC [air operator certificate] and unveiled our new cabin interiors and having now completed our initial three aircraft orders, we are in a position to fulfil our ambitious network goals,” added Douglas.

□□□□□

“We play an important role in the evolution of the Saudi aviation ecosystem with the aim to create 200,000 direct and indirect jobs and contribute almost \$20bn to the Kingdom’s non-oil GDP,” he said.

Riyadh Air also signed a deal with Rolls-Royce for 100 Trent XWB-97 engines to power its fleet of up to 50 Airbus A350-1000 ordered during the show.

At the same time, an MoU was also signed for Rolls-Royce’s comprehensive TotalCare service that will cover the health and maintenance of the engines. ▲



Avilease CEO Ted O’Byrne (left) signs up for the Airbus A350F (above) alongside the OEM’s head of sales Benoît de Saint-Exupéry.  
IMAGE: MARK PILLING

# Hamdi Osman

Marcelle Nethersole talks to the Founder and CEO of SolitAir.

## Can you tell me about SolitAir and its fleet?

SolitAir is the UAE's only dedicated cargo airline operating express daily scheduled airport-to-airport services between Dubai and high-yield key trade routes across the global south.

With its agile, customer-centric and technologically-advanced B2B business model, SolitAir is set to transform air cargo logistics by addressing middle-mile challenges for freight forwarders, integrator airlines and e-commerce platforms across Middle East including Iraq and Turkey, as well as Africa, the Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia.

The cargo carrier connects Dubai with key trade hubs across the global south through a robust network of express daily scheduled services with the aim to cover 50 cities within a six-hour radius of the UAE.

## What fleet does it consist of?

SolitAir operates a growing fleet of three narrow-bodied Boeing 737-800 BCF with a payload capacity of 23 tonnes and one 737-400 aircraft with a payload of 18 tonnes. Four more aircraft will join our fleet by the end of 2025 with the aim to have a fleet of 20 by 2027.

## Where does Solitair operate?

We operate special programmes including Dubai–Dhaka–Hong Kong–Dhaka–Dubai, and return flights to Mumbai, Chennai, Karachi and Istanbul from our base at Al Maktoum International Airport (DWC).

We serve the Middle East including Kuwait, Bahrain and Erbil. Last year, we launched our first daily scheduled flights between Dubai and Riyadh.

Carrying cargo on both legs of the journey, the service will be available five days a week, and is operated by SolitAir's narrow-body Boeing 737-800 freighter, with a capacity of 23 tonnes.

## Are global economic conditions affecting the air cargo industry?

Despite economic challenges, e-commerce continues to drive air cargo demand as it is predicted that, by 2027, e-commerce will make up nearly a quarter of total global retail sales. The need for rapid delivery of online purchases keeps air cargo volumes relatively stable.

SolitAir benefits significantly from its base at Al Maktoum International Airport in Dubai South, a strategic hub with advanced infrastructure. This location supports efficient operations and connectivity to key global south markets within a six-hour radius from the UAE.

## How does SolitAir embrace sustainability?

SolitAir is taking significant steps towards sustainability and addressing environmental concerns in the air cargo industry.

SolitAir has selected the Boeing 737-800 CF, which is equipped with winglets to improve flight efficiency and overall performance. The 737-800BCF aircraft is powered by two CFM56-7BE turbofan engines. These engines reduce fuel consumption and carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions by 15-20 per cent compared with the original first-generation 737s.

SolitAir is committed to sustainability and has already signed contracts with two electric aircraft manufacturers. The company is set to receive a number of electrically-powered aircraft by late 2027 or early 2028.

## How is SolitAir keeping up with technology/digital enhancements?

SolitAir is leveraging advancements in technology and digitalisation to enhance cargo handling in several keyways.

We utilise advanced tracking systems to provide real-time visibility of shipments. This technology enables customers to monitor their cargo throughout its entire journey, ensuring transparency, reliability and improved customer confidence.

We also employ automated cargo handling systems. These systems streamline the loading and unloading processes, reducing handling times, minimising errors and improving operational efficiency.

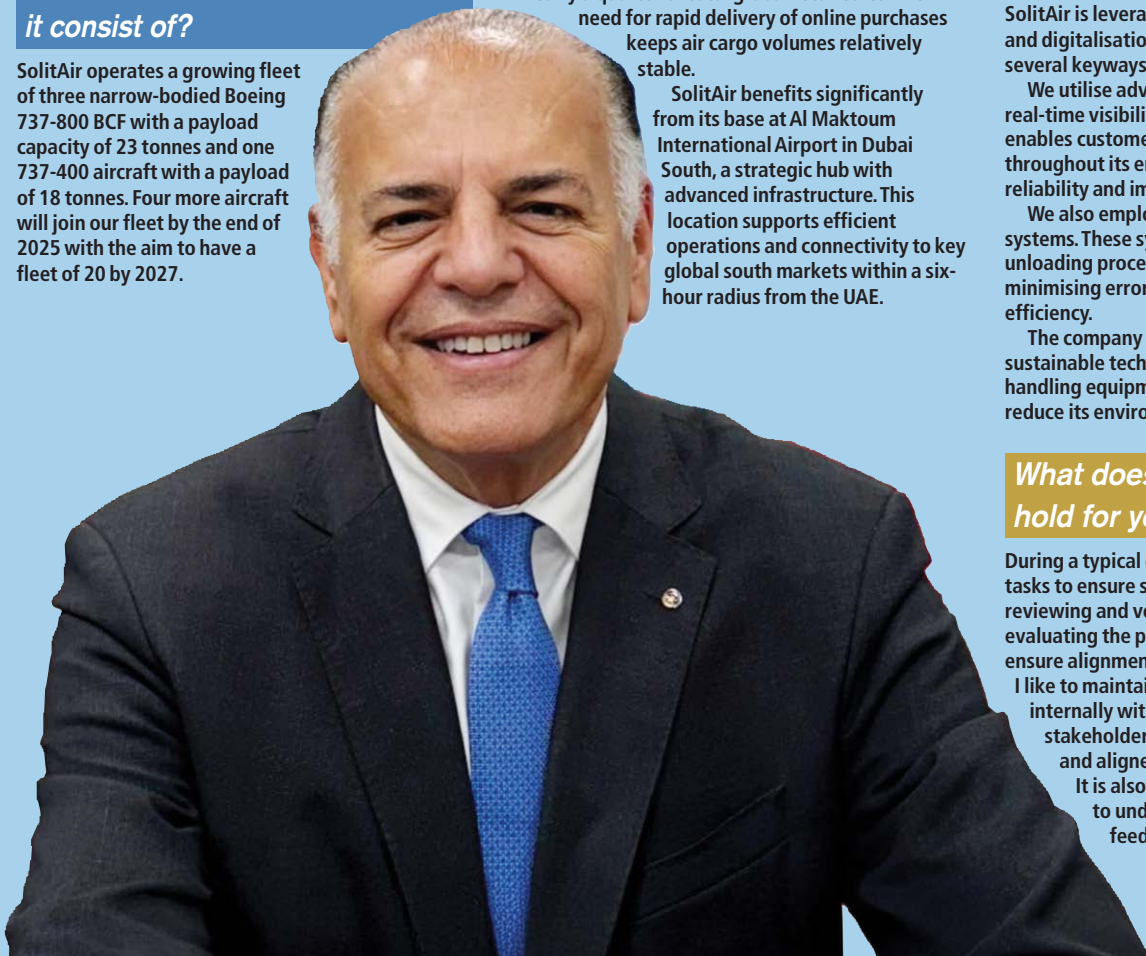
The company is also exploring the use of sustainable technologies, such as electric ground handling equipment and fuel-efficient aircraft, to reduce its environmental impact.

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

During a typical day in my role, I focus on several key tasks to ensure smooth operations, including reviewing and verifying the programme grid and evaluating the planning from the previous period to ensure alignment with current goals.

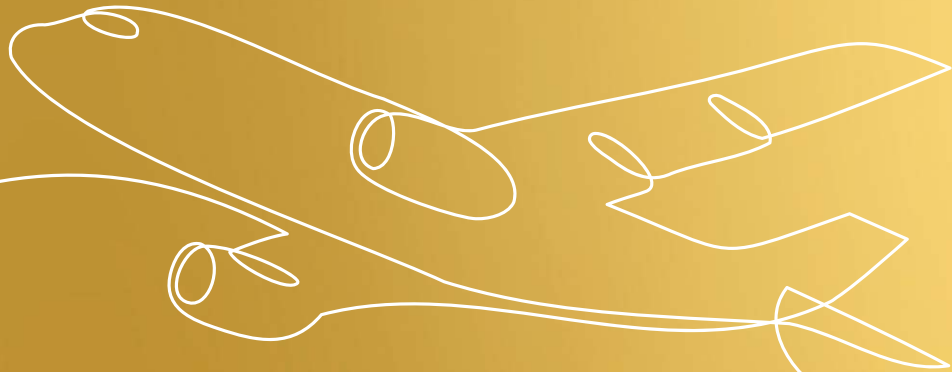
I like to maintain consistent communication both internally with our team and externally with stakeholders to ensure all parties are informed and aligned.

It is also important for me to visit customers to understand their needs, gather feedback and strengthen relationships.





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