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Iranian business aviation in the post-sanctions era

"The future of business aviation in Iran: dawn of a new era" was one of the panel discussions at the Iranian Aviation Forum held in London on 12 – 13 September, which addressed the challenges, risks and opportunities for the Iranian civil aviation industry in the post-sanctions era.

Speakers at the conference agreed that commercial aviation would be the first area to open up with business aviation playing "catch up". There are currently just 20 corporate jets registered in Iran, the bulk of which are early generation aircraft with a high proportion operated for the government or military. The oldest operational aircraft is a 47-year-old Lockheed Jetstar.

While there is potential for private charter flights into Iran at the same time as the opening of commercial airline routes and fleets, speakers agreed that the import of corporate jets remains out of the question under current US Office of Foreign Assets Control restrictions.

Wijet and Blink form the world's largest VLJ taxi operator

French air taxi company Wijet has created the world's largest Very Light Jet (VLJ) air taxi operation with the acquisition of UK charter specialist Blink. In a formal announcement on 28 September, it was confirmed that the new Wijet Group would boast a fleet of 15 Cessna Citation 510 Mustang VLJs.

The aircraft will retain their current identities before transitioning to a new unified brand in the near future. Blink will add its fleet availability to the real-time online booking platform OpenJet. Launched in 2008 and based at Blackbushe Airport in Hampshire, UK, Blink completed the purchase of Italian operator MyJet last year. Wijet Group will continue to be headquartered in Paris, with maintenance and operations hubs in both the UK and northern Italy. Wijet was founded in 2009 and it is understood that the new combined entity has ambitious plans to grow the fleet to some 45 aircraft by 2020.

Clay Lacy and Key Air come together

In another example of industry consolidation, California-based aircraft charter, management, FBO and maintenance firm Clay Lacy Aviation is merging with Key Air, an aircraft management and charter company based in Connecticut. After a transition period, the combined company will use the Clay Lacy Aviation name and will have a managed fleet of some 75 aircraft in 15 US locations. Integration of the two companies is under way at the US FAA level and should be completed by year-end.

Gulfstream ends G150 production

On 28 September, Gulfstream Aerospace announced that it had sold the last Gulfstream G150 mid-size twin. The final production aircraft will be handed over next year. The company is to specialise in its range of super mid-size and large cabin aircraft – from the G280 to the flagship G650ER. The G150 was an improved version of the G100, which was originally developed by Israel Aircraft Industries as the Astra. The G150, which offered a wider and extended cabin along with uprated powerplant, entered service in 2006. A total of 120 G150 aircraft remain in worldwide service according to the manufacturer. In announcing the programme cancellation, Gulfstream has committed to supporting the aircraft currently in service.

Stratajet launches in US

UK-based online booking platform Stratajet, launched in the US market in early September with the backing of 125 North American aircraft operators. Another 123 operators have committed to making their fleets available via the site and these will be added in the coming months. Since going live in 44 countries across Europe in April, 111 operators have signed up to offer aircraft through Stratajet.

Stratajet aims to provide price comparison and real-time pricing for customers looking to charter private jets. It seeks to eliminate fundamental inefficiencies in the charter industry by allowing multiple quotes to be generated automatically, taking account of all cost factors in any given trip. The company's software also allows partial empty legs to be factored into flight cost calculations, potentially making charter rates more competitive.

Stratajet was founded by Jonny Nicol, a former British military officer, who earlier this year flew the company's Piper Chieftain across the Atlantic to tour the US, meeting with 225 operators and leading FBOs over the course of 160 days in order to persuade them to make their fleets and data available. "The launch of the platform into the US is a huge step in the direction of further eliminating the industry's inefficiency and wastage, thus improving the profitability of jet operators, lowering costs for passengers and making private aviation more widely available to the mainstream traveller," he said.

RANA SERVICE CENTRE:

Consultancy

Sound, accurate and comprehensive information is a key requirement for making the right decisions in respect of owning, registering and operating an aircraft. RANA's specialist aviation consultancy service can draw upon a considerable breadth of knowledge across both the corporate and commercial aviation markets, which is coupled to our established links with authorities, manufacturers, service providers and operators worldwide.

The spectrum of our expertise encompasses: technical and performance specifications of competing aircraft models – from small pistons and turboprops through the whole range of corporate jets to commercial airliners; research and detailed reporting on the operational history of individual airframes and operators both private and commercial; the registration and ownership requirements of registries worldwide; and the most suitable and efficient corporate structures for holding aviation assets.

Nigeria to dispose of part of Presidential fleet

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari pledged to reduce the size of the country's Presidential Air Fleet within the Nigerian Air Force as part of an election campaign cost-cutting package. It was confirmed at the beginning of this month that two of 16 aircraft are to be put up for sale. A Falcon 7X (registered 5N-FGU) currently in Abuja, joins a Hawker 4000 (5N-FGX) available for inspection in Zurich. Both aircraft are being offered for sale (in US Dollars) with interested bidders given a period of four weeks to place offers. It is understood that a review of the Presidential Air Fleet is ongoing and that other aircraft may be transferred to the regular Nigerian Air Force fleet in due course.

51 North acquires Executive Aviation Services

51 North, the Farnborough Airport-based corporate jet management specialist, has acquired management and charter operator Executive Aviation Services (EAS). EAS, which is based at Gloucestershire Airport, was established in 1995 while 51 North was founded in 2007. The acquisition unites the AOC, experience of fixed wing and rotary operations, compatible services and experienced teams within both companies. The combined 51 North Group will employ some 20 staff. "The corporate jet industry has become very fragmented and the only way forward is the consolidation of compatible companies," said 51 North Group chairman Neil Cochrane. 51 North managing director Kirsty Murphy will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the group.

Isle of Man register's 900th aircraft

On 16 September, the Isle of Man Aircraft Registry (IOMAR) reached a significant milestone with the registration of its 900th aircraft. The aircraft, a Dassault Falcon 900EX formerly registered in China as B-8212, was added to the Manx register as M-TFFS. IOMAR was established on 1 May 2007 as Europe's first private/corporate register and has since grown to become the sixth largest corporate aircraft register in the world. Of the 900 aircraft registered, a total of 453 remain current.

Corporate aircraft news

Dassault handed over the first example of its flagship tri-jet Falcon 8X to a customer at its plant at Bordeaux-Merignac on 5 October. Falcon 8X received EASA and FAA certification at the end of June. The first example (construction number 405) was handed over to Greek charter specialist Amjet and registered SX-CGR. The ultra-long-range 8X is a stretched derivative of the popular Falcon 7X and can accommodate up to 19 passengers.

Specialist corporate charter operator Comlux The Aviation Group has performed the first retrofit of sharklets for an Airbus ACJ319. The conversion, the first on any variant of the Airbus A319 airliner, offers fuel savings of up to 4% and resultant increase in range. Comlux currently has a sole ACJ319 and ACJ330 on the Maltese register along with Europe's first Sukhoi Business Jet based on the SSJ airliner.

Daher delivered its 800th TBM turboprop single on 20 September. The aircraft, a TBM 930 – appropriately registered as N930EA – was handed over to Elliott Aviation in Des Moines, Iowa. The first TBM 700 entered production in 1991.

Wichita-based aircraft manufacturer Cessna Aircraft has delivered its 5,000th light business jet. At the end of September, a Citation M2 was handed over to Helitrip Charter, which is leasing the aircraft to UK aircraft charter firm Catreus. In June, Cessna shipped the 7,000th Citation, a line of jets that spans light to super-midsize. Cessna entered the light jet segment in 1972 when it delivered the first Citation 500.

Embraer announced that the first US-assembled Legacy 450 had made its maiden flight yesterday from Embraer Executive Jets' facility in Melbourne, Florida, on 4 October, some five months after it entered the production line at the plant.



AIRCRAFT FACT FILE \\\

Yakovlev Yak-42D



CATEGORY

Heavy jet

MANUFACTURER

Yakovlev, Russia

ENGINE

3x Lotarev D-36 turbofans

LENGTH

36.38 m

WINGSPAN

34.88 m

RANGE

4,000 km

MAX. SPEED

810 kmh

SEATING CAPACITY

up to 120 in airline service

NO. OF CREW

2 + flight engineer

MAXIMUM TAKE-OFF WEIGHT (MTOW)

57,500 kg

DESCRIPTION

The tri-jet Yakovlev Yak-42 airliner was originally conceived in the mid-1970s and was designed to replace the huge numbers of Tupolev TU-134 jets and Antonov AN-24 and Ilyushin IL-18 turboprop aircraft in Aeroflot's commercial fleet. The first prototypes flew in 1975 and the first production aircraft was completed in April 1978 and it entered commercial service (from Moscow to Krasnodar) in December 1980. The Yak-42D was a version of the original with extended range provided through additional fuel capacity. This variant was introduced in 1989 and became the standard production version going forward.

Total production of the Yak-42 of all versions totalled some 185 airframes when production ceased in 2003. A small number of Yak-42D found their way to service in the executive/corporate role with individuals and companies following the break-up of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Just over 30 aircraft remain in service currently in airline and executive use