Zarkani says, referring to the national carrier's chairman.
If the future is as big as Zarkani believes it to be, then his own fleet does not look exactly formidable, but one has to start somewhere. Currently in operation ZAS has three 707s, two of them freighters and one with a newly refitted passenger cabin (all of them hush-kitted), and one McDonnell Douglas MD-82 (leased from GPA). In October a second MD-82 arrives from GPA, and by the year's end ZAS will have acquired two DC-9-33s from Adria.

The passenger 707 has two tasks: with the MD-82 it works the desperately busy domes-tic schedules from Cairo to (and among) tourist destinations such as Luxor, Aswan, and Abu Simbel (those routes had begun to exceed Egyptair's capacity, so ZAS was licensed last December to operate them); and it plies the Cairo-Amsterdam route—once a week now, but thrice-weekly from October. This is a service which Egyptair did not run, though KLM did, and Zarkani says that he frequently takes KLM overbookings.

Cargo is where Zarkani started, and he says that he will stay in that market as well as entering the passenger field. By the end of next year, when there will have been a number of additions to the fleet, ZAS plans still to be operating two 707 freighters. When they eventually go, Zarkani sees the carrier using a larger aircraft, perhaps a DC-10. But ZAS has already ordered two MD-11 Combis, with delivery of the first due in 1992.

About 70 per cent of ZAS's cargo opera-tion is scheduled, the remainder being ad hoc or regular charter. The main schedules are out of Cairo via Amsterdam, Paris, or Frank-furt to New York. Cargo carried out of Egypt is mostly fresh produce and cloth, and inbound can be "everything". Zarkani himself trades in commodities which his airline can bring in and which are in demand in Egypt, though this is seen as a method of filling aeroplanes.
From Amsterdam ZAS often carries cargo on behalf of KLM, and, case-by-case, may carry fifth-freedom freight between Amsterdam and New York. Paris is co-operative on the latter type of arrangement because, Zarkani explains, Air France gener-ally operates to advantage within the Franco-Egyptian bilateral agreement. In the other direction the scheduled flights are to Khartoum, Sharjah, Sana'a' Larnaca, Muscat, Mogadishu, and Addis Ababa. Amsterdam is ZAS's commercial centre, while Cairo is its headquarters and opera-tions office. Zarkani spends more of his time in Amsterdam than in Cairo because, he says, "We need to have a commercial point in Europe to generate cargo". Egypt does not generate enough on its own. The other important office is in New York, which deals with most of the transatlantic traffic.

Over the last few years annual turnover reached between $35 million and $40

Sharif Zarkani is ZAS's founder and president

million while cargo was the carrier's only business. By the end of this year, the first year in passenger operations, Zarkani reckons that ZAS will have turned-over $25 million in passenger traffic alone, a little more than half that income being derived from the airline's Egyptian domestic operations.
Zarkani started cargo operations with one unhushed 707 freighter, and at the late 1987 peak was flying six of them, all of which he had sent to Santa Barbara for hushkitting to comply with US noise regulations. Now, he says, although the air cargo trade is expand-ing, the market is saturated with capacity, and he has had to look all over the world to win business.

Right from its 1982 beginning ZAS has been involved in sub-charter and leasing activities in addition to its full charter work, flying subservices for KLM, Alia, Martinair, Air India, Finnair, and others. It has also performed ad hoc work for relief agencies and for freight forwarders worldwide. Having started with 12 employees, ZAS now has about 200.

Three Lockheed JetStar corporate jets

would seem something of an anomaly in ZAS's fleet, especially since they were added in 1986, when Zarkani was operating a pure cargo airline. Actually, their purchase was indeed pure business opportunism. The German Government had a JetStar for sale, complete with a considerable spares stock, and maintenance backup was available from MBB (which still has the maintenance contract). The price was low, so in 1986 Zarkani bought ZAS's first JetStar. The following year the German Government put two more JetStars on the market, and Zarkani bought those as well.

"They are not a big overhead for the company," explains Zarkani, given their price and the fact that they were flown by ZAS pilots already employed. Although the JetStars have not been used for regular runs or scheduled routes, Zarkani points out that the small jets were ZAS's first venture into passenger-carrying. It was a useful way of finding out if Egyptair would mind ZAS flying more than cargo; using "just a small mosquito", as Zarkani put it, to see if the flag-carrier flinched, and to test the Govern-ment's attitude to an expansion of ZAS's area of operations.

Nobody flinched. So, since 1986 ZAS has offered the range of services which this long-range corporate aircraft can provide. Customers include oil-industry and other business executives, VIPs, and even block bookings by travel agents for small groups of tourists who are prepared to pay a high price for luxury and exclusivity on their tour of ancient Egypt and the Nile valley. The Middle East may have some poor commu-nities but, as is well known, it is also the
home of tremendous wealth. The market for
corporate jet services is substantial. ZAS's
brochure for its JetStar services lists sales
offices in Cairo, Luxor, Amsterdam, London
Gatwick Airport, Frankfurt Airport, and

Lockheed JetStars gave ZAS its first entry into the passenger market, at the corporate and specialist en
still operates three

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