



*Uzbekistan Airways flies its new AI(R) RJ-85 to ancient Silk Road towns of Samarkand and Bukhara*

mercial director Shuhrat Rakhimov says: "Ukraine and Russia have been 'dumping' aircraft on the market," further driving down prices.

Gradually, though, and not without a little prompting from the West, TAPO is finding its way. It recently signed a marketing agreement with Fortis Aviation of the UK and has taken what it hopes is the first tentative step towards licence production of Western aircraft, in a deal with Aero International (Regional) (AI(R)) under which it has started producing components for the AI(R) RJ family (*Flight International*, 16-22 July). This is part of an offset agreement under which Uzbekistan Airways will have three RJ-85s by early 1998.

## MASS PRODUCTION

The factory is optimistically preparing for mass production of the stretched Il-76MF powered by Perm Motors PS-90As, which Fortis is likely to market. The development prototype is undergoing certification trials at Gromov's Flight Test and Research Institute in Zhukovski, Russia, and is due to be certificated by the end of 1997.

Around 40,000 employees still draw around \$130 a month each from TAPO. It was previously "cradle-to-grave stuff", says an AI(R) employee whose factory has a similar output with 2,000 employees. TAPO has yet to implement changes, so AI(R) insisted that a separate cost-centre is used for its work. Rakhimov says that steps have been taken to set up a sales force outside the CIS. TAPO has set up agencies in the USA and south-east Asia and will visit Africa in

the near future. It has organised a marketing department and is to launch a leasing company (Uzavia-leasing) this month. He admits that leasing is the only way Russian airlines are likely to be able to afford to take up the 600 Il-114s ordered, at the asking price of about \$10million each.

AI(R) executives express frustration that Il-114s may be ordered by the Uzbekistan airline, since TAPO needs the backing of its country's flag carrier, whereas AI(R) could provide ATR 42s far more cost-effectively, particularly in the long run. They also believe that the airline would like more RJs.

The Il-114 programme represents a major investment for the country, however. Russian funding was withdrawn following the loss of the second prototype on 5 July, 1993, on take-off from Moscow's Khodinka Airport, home of the Ilyushin design bureau.

TAPO has since pushed on alone with Government backing in the hope that Aeroflot Russian International Airlines (ARIA) will go ahead in ordering around 600 of the type to achieve its recently stated aim of setting up regional hubs all over Russia. Meanwhile, the flight-test programme at Zhukovski having finished, two Il-114s are being flown by Uzbekistan Airways for a year as part of certification trials. The passenger version was certificated earlier this year, while the freighter is expected to gain approval in September.

The major problem with the Il-114 has been its Klimov TV-7-117 powerplants. The airline purchased two Il-114s "a couple of years ago",



*The national airline's Airbus A310s will soon replace Ilyushin Il-62s at repair "Plant 243"*

before realising that the aircraft had experimental engines requiring overhaul after only 300h. With nowhere to overhaul the engines, both aircraft were grounded. TAPO's Rakhimov says that the Moscow-based Ilyushin is working with Pratt & Whitney Canada to re-engine the Il-114. "I had a meeting with [P&WC] and they told me they would provide financing for TAPO on condition that I place a firm order for ten airframes with PW127s," he says.

Uzbekistan Airways now operates a VIP-configured Boeing 757, two 767-300ERs and an RJ85 Avroliner. Ruzmetov signed the original memorandum of understanding with AI(R) in Seattle while he was training to fly the 767, the first of which he flew back to Tashkent in December 1996. According to Ruzmetov, a further contract with Boeing similar to that struck with AI(R) through TAPO is expected to be signed later this year, enabling it to acquire two Boeing-767F freighters through the sale of two Il-76s to an undisclosed Western buyer. Ruzmetov says, however, that the airline is to replace most of its current fleet of 20 Il-76TD/MDs with MFs.

## MAINTENANCE

The airline is thought to want to shed its aviaement (maintenance operation) at Tashkent's Yuzny Airport, which is still known as Aviation Repair Plant 243. Built in 1977, it performs overhauls of Il-62s, Il-76s and Il-86s as well as of the Ivchenko Al-25 engine for the Yakovlev Yak-40. Chief manager Nikolay Zhuravlev admits that "...there is not much work now - around 45 overhauls a year". One of three cells will be turned over to C-checks on the company's Airbus A310 aircraft towards the end of next year, however. British Aerospace Engineering Services of Filton, UK, is in the process of training Uzbeki engineers from the plant.

TAPO used to have spares and customer support operations at Tashkent Airport, but this is now handled at the Tashkent plant. Zhuravlev says that the plant also provides Il-62 and Il-76 overhaul for the rest of the CIS and for Arab, Chinese and other operators.

Elsewhere, modernisation of the rest of the Uzbeki aviation infrastructure includes significant investment in airports and air-traffic control, increasing from 200 to 500 the number of flights which can be handled in Uzbek airspace each day. □



*TAPO has many part-built and "white-tail" Ilyushin Il-76s at its extensive Tashkent plant*