

City Bird suspends Kinshasa service

CITY BIRD has suspended its weekly services between Brussels and Congolese capital Kinshasa after local authorities levied a \$1 million landing charge at the airport. There have also apparently been threats that City Bird's Boeing 767-300ER may be blown up or seized if it lands at Kinshasa.

City Bird inaugurated services to Kinshasa last April, on a wet-lease contract for local airline Lignes Aériennes Congolaises (LAC). Having been advised of the landing fees hike, City Bird cancelled services after also receiving threats that its aircraft would be blown up.

The developments are believed to be linked to the crash of an LAC-chartered McDonnell Douglas DC-8-62F at Kinshasa on 16 October, which was inbound from Ostend, Belgium. City Bird says it has no connection with the aircraft. A Congolese delegation was due to discuss the situation in Brussels at the end of October. □

Kalahari Express services up and away

NAMIBIAN REGIONAL carrier Kalahari Express began operations on 31 October from its Windhoek base.

The Air Namibia subsidiary has acquired two ex-Ansett Australia F28 Mk3000s, with the second to be delivered by the end of the year. The initial network includes services to Cape Town and Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

The start-up comes three years after the original shareholder, a Namibian business consortium, was licensed following a long battle with Air Namibia, which had opposed the application.

Namibian state holding company TransNamib bailed out Kalahari Express in June last year. TransNamib negotiated an equity agreement with South African regional SA Airlink, which would have operated to South Africa.

The start-up was rescheduled for February, but the SA Airlink deal was later nullified. When Air Namibia was corporatised in April, Kalahari became a subsidiary. □

Sobelair management and pilots face fraud charges

HERMAN DE WULF/BRUSSELS

THE FORMER chief executive, members of the management and pilots of Sabena's charter airline Sobelair face charges of forgery and fraud following a five-year investigation by the country's authorities.

Retired former chief executive Pierre Jonnart, 27 Sobelair captains and management members face charges of falsifying flight documents to show aircraft were used less than they actually were, to stretch times between maintenance

and to cut servicing costs.

Pilots were also encouraged to fly faster, to reduce flying time, and received extra pay for arriving ahead of schedule, the Belgian investigation reveals.

The alleged fraud was made public in 1994 when Sobelair pilot Pierre Ghosez filed an official complaint after being fired when he refused to forge documents. The Belgian authorities have been investigating the matter since then and now have a case to bring to court. A date for the hearing has yet to be determined.

Last year, the Belgian authorities threatened to remove Sobelair's air operator's certificate when its investigations revealed that the airline was not meeting maintenance requirements.

Sobelair's parent, Sabena, has also been a victim of the fraud. Sabena charged Sobelair by the hour for aircraft dry-leased by the charter division during the holiday season. The falsification of aircraft use meant that Sabena was paid considerably less for the use of its aircraft. Sabena declines to comment on the case. □

SriLankan Airlines receives its first Trent 772-powered Airbus



SRILANKAN AIRLINES has taken delivery of the first of nine Rolls-Royce Trent 772-powered Airbus A330-200s, as the airline moves towards becoming an all A330/A340 operator. The remaining aircraft are due between now and December next year, replacing the airline's four Lockheed L-1011 TriStars. SriLankan, which is part owned by Dubai's Emirates, will operate the 281-seaters on services from Colombo to Kuala Lumpur, Rome, Zurich, Stockholm, Munich, Beirut, Sydney and Asian destinations.

Airbus wraps up Chinese package

A PACKAGE OF orders for 28 Airbus aircraft for Chinese carriers was announced by French president Jacques Chirac in late October, while hosting a visit by China's president Jiang Zemin.

Although Chirac revealed that the deal includes eight A340-500/600s, 10 A318s and 10 A319s, details such as the identity of the airline customers were not disclosed. The announcement confirms a series of deals reported over recent months, including orders

placed directly with Airbus and contracts with leasing companies. *Flight International* understands the package includes:

- eight Pratt & Whitney PW6000-powered A318s for Beijing-based Air China, plus two options, with deliveries from 2003;
- 10 CFM International CFM56-powered A319s for Shanghai-based China Eastern Airlines (CEA), which are part of a previously reported deal with leasing company GE Capital Aviation

Services. Deliveries will begin in the second half of next year.

- eight Rolls-Royce Trent 500-powered A340-500/600s for CEA, including four -600s for delivery from 2002 on lease from International Lease Finance, along with four -500s to be ordered directly from Airbus. The deal is also understood to include a further three -600 options.

The total value of the package, based on list prices, is more than \$2 billion. □