



Fan-static beast

A surprise star of the show touched down yesterday evening, as one of the US Air Force's (USAF's) Boeing B-52H strategic bombers arrived for a static display appearance.

The giant combat veteran is on display as part of a US military corral which also includes a Fairchild-Republic A-10, Lockheed Martin C-130J and Sikorsky MH-53E.

The USAF maintains a 72-strong fleet of H-model bombers but is advancing a major upgrade which will re-equip

the eight-engined type with cleaner and more efficient Rolls-Royce F130s. The propulsion supplier and NASA earlier this year completed early work to assess a twin-pod configuration for the F130, ahead of commencing ground-based first engine to test activities.

Once ready for duty, the

USAF's updated B-52Js will serve alongside its planned future fleet of 100 Northrop Grumman B-21 Raider stealth bombers.

The first flight of an A-model B-52 Stratofortress took place in 1954, with the aircraft on display here having entered service in 1961.

The USAF deployed several B-52s to the Middle East region early this month, as part of measures intended to deter Iran from launching further military action against Israel.



BillyPix

Bell 505 makes home debut

Training helicopter on display as manufacturer adds customers in region and beyond

Craig Hoyle

One of the Royal Bahraini Air Force's (RBAF's) new Bell 505 training helicopters is making the type's debut appearance at the show, within the static display (pictured).

With the registration 1002, the light rotorcraft is one of three to have been accepted by the customer in February 2003 at Bell's Mirabel production site in Quebec, Canada. Its acquisition had not been announced at the time of the

2022 Bahrain show.

Also included in the deal is a training package, along with spare parts and tooling.

The airframer has a long history of equipping the RBAF, which also flies its AH-1Z Viper and earlier-model AH-1E/F Cobra attack helicopters, along with Bell 212/412 utility helicopters.

While Manama has so far acquired three of the aircraft, its military also still employs aged MBB BO105s in the training role.

FlightGlobal's soon-to-be-published 2025 World Air Forces



BillyPix

directory shows that Bell is increasingly establishing its 505 as a military asset in the Middle East and elsewhere around the globe.

More than 70 examples are now operational with air arms and military training providers, it shows, with other current users being Indonesia, Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Montenegro, Senegal, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates.

The five-seater is powered by a Safran Helicopter Engines Arrius 2R engine and has a maximum cruise speed of 125kt (231km/h).

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Vision jets



Saudi air force looks to future with eye-catching liveries on pair of fighters

Craig Hoyle

The Royal Saudi Air Force (RSAF) is displaying strikingly liveried examples of its most potent combat aircraft: the Boeing F-15SA (*front*) and Eurofighter Typhoon (*back*). Both types are also due to take part in the daily flying display.

Also adorned with Riyadh's Vision 2030 logo – referring to an ambitious drive to boost the capability of its domestic defence industry – the pair are part of a strong presence by the RSAF at this year's show. It also has sent its BAE Systems Hawk 65-equipped Saudi Hawks aerobatic display team to take part. The RSAF's inventory includes

around 230 F-15s – also counting earlier C- and S-model examples – and 72 Typhoons, along with 81 Panavia Tornado interdiction strike aircraft. Riyadh is assessing its options for a planned 54-aircraft procurement, with the enhanced F-15EX, Typhoon and Dassault Aviation Rafale as potential candidates.

Drone busters

US companies IronNet and Asterion are using the show to launch a new partnership intended to boost defences against unmanned air system (UAS) threats.

By combining their respective IronDome cyber threat protection and UAS detection and tracking technologies, the companies aim to target “unauthorised and hostile drones”. This approach will “strengthen the protection of critical infrastructure, urban environments, and national borders”, they claim.

“By embracing the convergence of cyber and aerial threat detection and defence, governments and organisations can ensure a more comprehensive and effective approach to safeguarding critical infrastructure and national interests,” says IronNet chief executive Linda Zecher.

“The methodology employs artificial intelligence, machine learning, and advanced sensor networks to analyse patterns and anomalies across a broad range of data sources,” the partner companies explain. “The result is a more robust and proactive defence system capable of identifying and mitigating threats before they can cause significant damage.”

VoltAero exits on eve of show

VoltAero has made the “difficult” last-minute decision to pull out of this year's show after being unable to guarantee its Cassio 330 mock-up could be shipped in time to another event in the region next week.

The move left the French company's large stand empty ahead of today's show opening.

VoltAero had planned to make its Bahrain debut before appearing at the Abu Dhabi Air Expo next week.

The company says it learned on Sunday that its freight provider could not promise that its full-scale model would arrive in the United Arab Emirates capital for the start of the general aviation event.

VoltAero is focusing on the region because it believes Gulf nations will be early adopters of advanced air mobility (AAM).

The hybrid electric aircraft developer – which inaugurated its first factory,

in southwest France, on Friday – is also offering local assembly of the fixed-wing aircraft to a potential industrial partner.

The mock-up to have been displayed is the same one that VoltAero has exhibited at several recent industry events as it aims for a first flight of the four-seat aircraft before the end of the year.

“This market is important for us,” says general director Marina Evans, who believes the willingness of Gulf governments to be first movers with aviation trends is an advantage. “It is a region where innovation can be applied to reality,” she says.

While VoltAero is one of more than a dozen AAM start-ups with designs at late stages of development, Evans insists that the Cassio 330's fixed-wing design and range of 648nm (1,200km) gives it the edge over electric vertical take-off



and landing rivals because it does not need “additional infrastructure” such as vertiports.

Its hybrid propulsion system – it can be powered by both an electric battery and conventional fuel – also means it is less dependent on ground charging, she says.

Use cases in this region might include replacing car journeys for trips such as the 150km between Abu

Dhabi to Dubai, or from Bahrain to Qatar, which currently requires a 30min airline flight – with airlines looking to shuttle premium customers among those likely to be interested, she says. Urgent cargo and medical evacuation are other possible missions, maintains Evans.

She says VoltAero would be prepared to open a final assembly line in the region to “bring production closer

to the market”. It has made similar commitments in North America and South-east Asia.

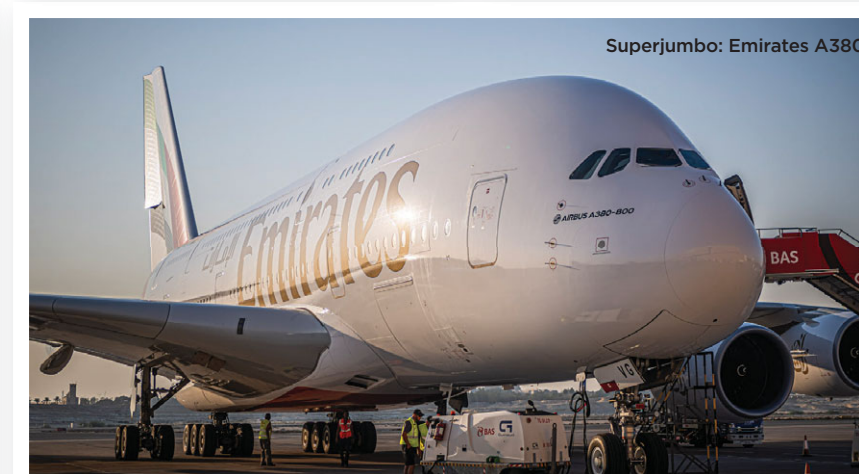
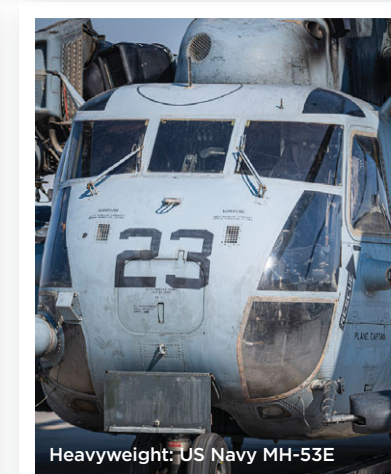
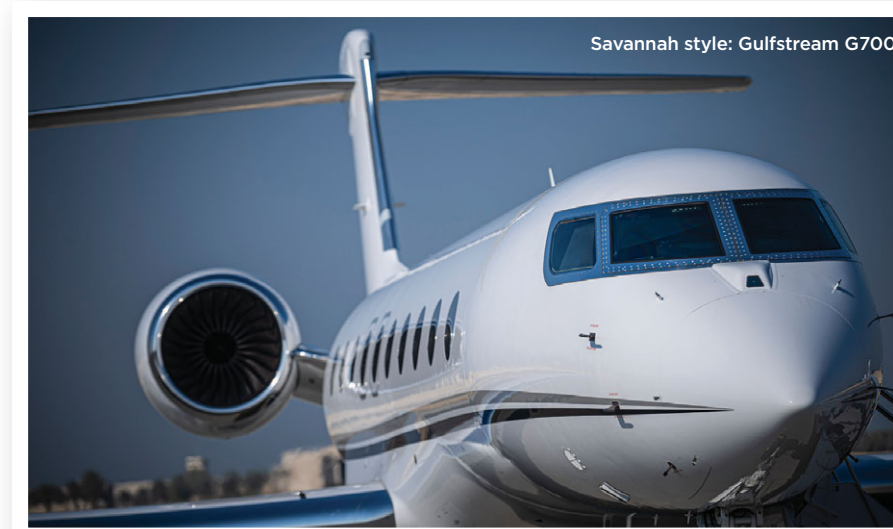
The Rochefort-based manufacturer – which was founded in 2017 by former Airbus chief technology officer Jean Botti – hopes to have the type certificated and in production by mid-2026, a target that has shifted several times over the past few years in common with almost all AAM developers.

Evans says opening a headquarters and production plant at the Rochefort-Charente-Maritime airport in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region is “a big step” that has “helped change the mentality within the company”.

“We are now making our first moves towards industrialisation and we have seen this dream become reality in such a short timeframe – construction took just nine months,” she adds.

Stars of the static

The Bahrain outdoor display features an array of metal, from airliners to the assets of half a dozen air forces, recreational aircraft to rotorcraft. Here are some of the highlights



Flying colours: Royal Saudi Air Force F-15SA



Shield AI looks to expand presence

Fast growing US artificial intelligence specialist Shield AI is at the show looking at further opportunities in the Gulf, after securing the United Arab Emirates as a customer for its V-Bat unmanned air vehicle and setting up an office in Abu Dhabi in 2022.

"We've not delivered products in this region yet other than to the UAE, but we are looking closely at Bahrain and the wider GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council]," says Bob Harward, executive vice-president for international business and strategy, who leads the Abu Dhabi operation and formerly headed Lockheed Martin's presence in the region.

While San Diego-based Shield AI offers a range of UAVs including the 57kg (125lb) ducted-fan V-Bat – which it added when it bought aerospace manufacturer Martin UAV in 2021 – its flagship technology is its Hivemind autonomy software, which it has integrated into the V-Bat platform.

"Our objective is to provide AI pilots, and to enable platforms with AI to make them more effective to work in a GPS-denied environment," he says.

Shield AI, which was set up in 2015 by brothers Ryan and Brandon Tseng, has been carrying out high profile trials of its AI technology in the USA.

In August, Shield AI completed flight tests of two unmanned Kratos MQM-178 Firejet target drones piloted by the Hivemind autonomy agent.

It has also been working with the US Air Force and Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency on the Air Combat Evolution project, which uses a modified Lockheed F-16 to demonstrate autonomous flight capabilities in dogfighting scenarios.

In May, the company also announced a contract with the US Coast Guard to provide intelligence surveillance, and reconnaissance services using its V-Bat.

Gulf's gold for Gulfstream



Murdo Morrison

The Gulf and wider Middle East is proving a strong market for Gulfstream. The Savannah-based manufacturer delivered the first example of its newest and fastest type – the 7,750nm (14,353km)-range G700 – to Qatar Executive earlier this year. The VIP charter arm of Qatar Airways has a total of eight of the Rolls-Royce Pearl 700-powered jet on order.

Gulfstream is exhibiting a G700 (pictured), alongside a Pratt & Whitney Canada PW-814GA-powered G500, at the show, and Scott Neal, senior vice-president of world-wide sales, says demand for

its products in the region "remains high", six decades after it delivered its first aircraft in the Middle East.

"The G700 and G500 provide a combination of advanced technology, cabin comfort and performance capabilities that continue to resonate with operators in the region," he says.

The G700 entered service

in April. Its 8,000nm-range stablemate, the G800, is awaiting entry into service – Gulfstream had been targeting certification by the end of this year. The 5,300nm-range G500 entered service in 2018, and with its G600 sibling, introduced Gulfstream's Symmetry flightdeck, which features the first active control sidesticks on a business jet.

Kallman's capabilities



Kallman Worldwide – which runs pavilions for US companies at air shows around the world – is launching a new service at the show.

Its Capabilities Showcase is designed as a "focal point for US industry", especially for businesses that do not have a physical presence in its pavilions.

The initiative is an extension of Kallman's shared chalet concept where US companies can access a meeting space and hospitality without having to commit to their own chalet, says vice-president business development Peter McKenna (pictured).

"There are something like 29 defence and aerospace shows in the next two-year cycle and it is difficult for companies to be everywhere," he says. "This concept allows them to have a presence and focal point at an event, perhaps when there is a local sales force or office in a region."

The Kallman pavilion includes booths from GE Aerospace, Marvin, and Shield AI and is part of what McKenna calls a "robust US presence" at this year's show.

Kallman is also showcasing its Sourcehere.com platform, which lists thousands of US companies by capabilities.

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Bahrain's flag-carrier is putting its faith in a customer offering based on convenient connections and a superb on-board product on a young Airbus narrowbody and Boeing 787 fleet, while playing its part in boosting tourism and investment into the kingdom

Gulf apart

Omid Behzadpour/Shutterstock

Murdo Morrison

Some might argue that Gulf Air has struggled to establish its identity in a region dominated by some of the industry's biggest hub-and-spoke connectors – with well-funded debutants such as Riyadh Air moving in. The question has long been: does the Bahrain-owned operator, which marks its 75th anniversary next year, aspire to compete with these global airline brands or hunker down as a short-haul specialist with a small number of long-haul routes?

Dr Jeffrey Goh – who arrived in January last year to head Gulf Air Group, the holding company for Gulf Air and its associated companies – says he has “no ambition to fly to every corner of the Earth”. However, he believes the one-time four-nation flag-carrier can strengthen its position with a gameplan based on select long-haul route development and a timetable of frequent and reliable regional connections. Other priorities include offering the region's best on-board experience on one of its youngest fleets, and helping to drive tourism, business and investment into Bahrain.

“We're running on all pistons for a transformational pivot on the airline”

is how the former Star Alliance chief describes the task. That pivot, well underway, includes a fleet overhaul – likely to be complete by next year although with the prospect of additional widebody orders to come – and “a very focused strategy around connectivity and customer service excellence”.

For the moment, Goh is performing the airline chief executive role on an acting basis, combining it with the group CEO position, where he also oversees Bahrain airport operator BAC, Bahrain Duty Free, and training provider GAA.

He will not be drawn on a timetable for a successor to Capt Waleed Al Alawi, who retired earlier this year after four years in charge, saying it is a decision for the Gulf Air Group board.

Goh says one of Gulf Air's biggest strengths is the youthfulness of its aircraft, which are on average 6.3 years old. The fleet revamp – which has involved replacing Airbus A330s with Boeing 787-9s and A320ceo aircraft with CFM Leap-powered A320neos and A321LRs – has seen the arrival of 10 new aircraft last year and two this year, with six A320s and two 787s to come.

As of end-September, its fleet comprised 10 787s, 14 A321LRs, six

A320neos, four A321ceos, and eight A320ceos. Goh expects to hold onto most of the older-generation narrowbodies for around three more years – “That's longer than we expected, but, like everyone, we are struggling to maintain capacity given the supply chain problems [impacting new aircraft deliveries],” he says. However, he maintains that Gulf Air's fleet is young compared with that of many of its counterparts.

The A321LRs – with 16 lie-flat seats in business as well as 150 in economy – allow the airline to operate the narrowbody on two-class, mid-haul routes to the likes of Frankfurt, the Maldives, Milan, Nice, Paris and Rome. However, while he says the airline is “comfortable” with its size and shape its of single-aisle fleet, he does hint at the need for “additional widebodies” at some point.

He describes Gulf Air's network objectives as “a disciplined ambition for growth to east and west, not just connecting east and west but bringing people into Bahrain and supporting our national tourism strategy”.

Around 70% of Gulf Air passengers currently connect through Bahrain, although this is a proportion Goh and his colleagues want to bring down by encouraging

more stays in the kingdom. “A lot of developments are happening in the tourism sector, and we are playing a part in that,” he says.

The USA remains a major gap in Gulf Air's destination map – in fact there are no direct US services by any airline into Bahrain. However, Goh says that while stateside schedules remain a “serious consideration and have been for some time”, the airline is also looking at “lots of other parts of the world as well as where we can increase frequencies”.

Like its regional counterparts Emirates and Etihad, Gulf Air is not a member of an alliance. However, it does have codeshares and informal partnerships with several carriers, including an agreement with Etihad signed in 2021 that allows Gulf Air to offer 30 combined destinations with the Abu Dhabi-based operator. “We have been very clear on the importance of our partner network,” says Goh.

Recent route additions have included Shanghai and Guangzhou – its first cities served in China – as well as the reintroduction of services to Najaf in Iraq, a popular pilgrimage destination for Bahrain's community of Shi'a Muslims. In July, it boosted its European network with four weekly flights to Munich.

The airline now has 10 787-9s



Gulf Air's A321LRs serve several cities in Europe

“We have spent time redefining the principles of our network, and we are looking to build from there,” says Goh. “Over the course of the next five years, you will see several more announcements.”

He believes that Gulf Air's cabin offering – particularly in business class – is maintaining loyalty among regular passengers and winning converts. “Our performance on our Guangzhou and Shanghai

Goh: We want to be a positive contributor to Bahrain's GDP

Billy Pirk

services has been better than we expected, which we pin down to on-board service,” says Goh.

A programme of “elevating the customer experience” includes free wi-fi on all long-haul flights where it is available, including on its A321LRs. Additionally, a pre-order meal service for business class passengers – offering around a dozen items on top of the standard on-board menu – will be rolled out “in due course” to inbound flights to Bahrain after a successful introduction on outbound journeys.

An 80-inch pitch in business class gives Gulf Air “one of the most luxurious” products on the market, while other parts of the mix include an enhanced in-flight entertainment offer, and new range of chinaware and glassware. “We pride ourselves on our Arabic hospitality, though our crews are from all over the world,” says Goh, who will maintain the momentum with the arrival of a new chief customer experience officer later this year.

Gulf Air represents around three-quarters of the Gulf Air Group's revenues and is “our flying billboard, our brand equity”, says Goh. However, he says the other businesses in the portfolio –

which was established under the ownership of state investment house Mumtalakat in 2010 – create a “cohesive entity”.

The group owns a 44% stake in ground handling, line maintenance, and staff resource provider Bahrain Airport Services.

Having the recently revamped airport as part of the group is “great for seamlessness”, says Goh, even if it means that some of his airline customers as owner of the airport are direct rivals of Gulf Air. “To foster greater connectivity, we want as many airlines as possible flying into Bahrain,” he says. “We welcome competition.” His role, he states, is “to choreograph everything”.

Gulf Air's pre-eminence in the region began to unravel in the mid-2000s, when – partly in response to the success of Emirates, launched by Dubai a decade earlier – the governments of Qatar (Qatar Airways), Abu Dhabi (Etihad) and Oman (Oman Airways) left the partnership to focus on their own new flag-carriers, leaving Bahrain as sole shareholder.

That break-up is, of course, now long in the past and Gulf Air's mission today, says Goh, is to “be a positive contributor to Bahrain's GDP and ensuring Bahrain is firmly on the international map”. In terms of its share of a competitive regional market, his ambition is to “retain a slice of the pie big enough to allow us to participate in a part of the world that is peppered with large airlines” ■

It may not be a mega-hub like Dubai or Doha, but Bahrain airport is looking to the next stage of its expansion. On the agenda are hotels, runway improvements, an enhanced customer offer, and an expanded cargo centre

Albinalah with a model of the airport as it looks now



Murdo Morrison

Bahrain's impressive \$1.1 billion terminal has been open less than four years but already Mohamed Yousif Albinalah is anticipating what comes next. Outside his office, the chief executive of Bahrain Airport Company (BAC) stands over a giant model that shows how the airport estate might look by the turn of the decade.

He points out potential landside locations for a new hotel, shopping complex, and apartments, as well as the eventual layout of a Cargo Village north of the runway – phase one of which has just been completed.

While he admits some of the plans are “at an early stage”, there is no doubting Bahrain's aim to boost its credentials as an aviation hub and continue diversifying its economy from fossil fuel exports into growing sectors such as high-end tourism and logistics.

A picture of Bahrain's airport from the 1980s, a time when the country was still the main destination for airlines in the Arabian Peninsula – the emergence of Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Dubai as global aviation hubs only began this century – shows little northeast of the runway but desert and scrubland rolling towards the sea.

Since then, a series of land reclamations, new highways, and housing and hotel construction on the island of Muharraq has seen entire new communities and artificial islands take shape around the airport, stretching for 2km into the waters of the Gulf.

The new terminal opened in January 2021 – the 210,000sq m (2,260,000sq ft) light-filled building replacing its next-door 1970s-era predecessor. The latter, though loved by many regular passengers for its cosiness, was operating at almost twice its design capacity and was largely demolished to make way for the new structure.

It was the first step in a growth plan that will also see an extension to the single runway in the next few years and its upgrading from ICAO Category 2 to Category 3, which “will give us more resilience in adverse weather”, says Albinalah. Also on the cards is phase two of the Cargo Village, and further development east of the terminal.

Additionally, last year saw the opening of a new private aviation terminal – a refurbishment of an even older main airport building dating from 1961 that previously housed the country's civil aviation administration offices (see *photo spread in tomorrow's issue*), and the construction of a royal pavilion.

Albinalah is looking forward to welcoming more passengers to a terminal that was built to handle 14

A history of aviation in Bahrain

The history of Bahrain airport goes back almost a century. In 1927, the first commercial aircraft to land in the country was an Imperial Airways de Havilland DH.34, chartered by a pearl merchant to fly between Baghdad and London, stopping in Bahrain.

The first flight to touch down in Bahrain was even earlier. The newly formed UK Royal Air Force landed a Vickers Vimy bomber in 1918 as part of a proving mission between London and Calcutta to establish if long-haul flights were possible through hot countries.

By the early 1930s, Bahrain had become a regular stop for Imperial Airways on its services to India, effectively becoming the first international airport in the Gulf. A passenger terminal (picture one) was opened in 1937.

The year 1950 was highly significant because it marked the launch of Gulf Air – or Gulf Aviation Company as it was then known. The Bahrain carrier had one aircraft, an Anson Mark II, and one route, to Dhahran in Saudi Arabia.

Within two years it had four de Havilland Dove aircraft and four Douglas DC-3s as its network throughout the Arabian Peninsula grew to include destinations including Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Muscat and Sharjah. By the 1960s, the airline was the major player in the region (picture two).

Another milestone occurred in 1954 when a Flight Information Region was established in Bahrain for aircraft transiting Gulf airspace. Even with the introduction of the jet age, and the need for fewer stops on long-haul flights, Bahrain retained its status as a key west-to-east stopping point.

By the middle of that decade, and with transglobal flights such as London to Singapore, Hong Kong, and Sydney becoming commonplace – albeit with multiple refuelling stops, Bahrain had become a key staging post and the need for a new airport was evident.

million passengers and 130,000 air traffic movements a year – more than three times the traffic the previous terminal was designed for. This year, BAC expects passenger numbers to be 9.6 million, which is still slightly down on the pre-Covid 2019 total of 9.7 million, but Albinalah insists progress is steady “despite all the headwinds”.

The terminal continues to “look fresh” and is “very efficient and customer friendly”, according to Albinalah. “Everything is paying off for us, based on feedback and third-party appraisals,” he says. This includes a top five-star rating from airport review organisation Skytrax every year since opening. “In a region where there are lots of mega



In 1959, the then-ruler Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, laid the foundation stone for a new airport building that today serves as Bahrain's VIP terminal. It was officially opened in 1962.

In the 1970s, Bahrain has become firmly established as a transit stop for long-haul airlines flying between Europe and Asia-Pacific, including Air India, British Airways, Pan Am, Qantas, and Singapore Airlines on

their Boeing 747s (picture three).

A new chapter began for Gulf Air too in 1973 when BOAC's majority shareholding was bought by the governments of Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and Abu Dhabi (representing the United Arab Emirates), setting up the airline as the official flag carrier of the four countries. It was a structure that remained until the 2000s.

In 1976, Bahrain's increased traffic necessitated the opening of another terminal building, which was in service until 2021. That was the year of one of the country's greatest claims to aviation fame – flights by British Airways' new Aerospatiale/British Aerospace Concorde (picture four) began.

Bahrain was not first on BA's choice of destinations but, hamstrung by a ban on using most US airports because of the sonic boom, the UK airline launched services to the Gulf country in January that year.

The flight took 4h, compared with the 6.5h non-supersonic aircraft needed. The idea was that Bahrain would be a stopping point for services to Southeast Asia (flights to Singapore began in partnership with Singapore Airlines, but only three return services were completed initially because of complaints about the sonic boom from Malaysia).

The year 1976 also marked another significant development for Gulf Air, which took delivery of its first Lockheed TriStar, allowing the four-nation airline to become a serious long-haul player for the first time.

That decade saw the opening of a new terminal, with further expansion taking place in 1980. However, by the end of the 1980s it was clear that more infrastructure would be needed. Bahrain airport's expanded main terminal – which served as the country's air entry point until its demolition in 2021 – opened in 1994.

has a dedicated lounge). In October, BAC issued tender documents for a project to extend a taxiway that serves as an emergency runway. This will allow the airport to resurface the main runway at a later date without disrupting operations significantly.

BAC will officially launch phase two of its Cargo Village development on the north side of the runway in December. Under phase one – which has seen some 58,000sq m or about three-fifths of the total planned site developed – FedEx Express has already moved into two warehouses. The hope is to attract other operators (see *Cargo Feature P18*), transforming the airport into a major regional hub for air freight. ■

Room to grow

BIAS director general Yousif Mahmoud explains why he believes the biennial event is unique in the industry

Five-star show

Murdo Morrison

Fourteen years after its inaugural edition – and with a 180-strong exhibitor list including 11 of the industry's top 15 aerospace and defence companies and around 46,000 visitors last time – the Bahrain International Airshow (BIAS) has firmly established itself as a destination date in the industry calendar.

However – as with the country's other main international extravaganza, the annual Formula 1 Grand Prix – there is a further benefit to staging the biennial event. It helps put the tiny Gulf kingdom on the map and promote Bahrain as a welcoming destination for aerospace and other businesses looking to invest or establish a regional hub.

"We have a very friendly economy, with zero tax, open regulations, financial incentives, free zones for international companies," says Yousif Mohamed Mahmoud, the show's director general. "Plus, life is easy here for an expat. There is easy access to other [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries. We are less expensive than many of our neighbours. There are fewer traffic jams and good schools. You can have a very relaxed, Western lifestyle."

That is why the country's government wants to do all it can to persuade companies exhibiting at or attending this week's show to make Bahrain their home. "The next step for us is persuading more companies to invest here," says Mahmoud. "The likes of BAE Systems, Indra, Leonardo, and Thales have established offices, but we want businesses to go further

– to create distribution hubs or training centres."

BIAS – run by the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications in partnership with Farnborough International – is no longer the new kid among international air shows. First held in January 2010, the event has been growing steadily. It expanded with the addition of its first exhibition hall in 2014 – a converted military hangar – to add to the permanent hospitality chalets and a static display.

In 2018, the event moved from January to November to create a 12-month gap with the region's other major air show, in Dubai, which takes place in odd years. Cancelled along with other industry gatherings in 2020 because of the pandemic, BIAS returned in 2022. This is its seventh edition.

BIAS, insists Mahmoud, is unlike its counterparts. "We see ourselves as a five-star boutique air show," he says. "We are not the same as other air shows." One key difference is the row of 40 permanent suites that exhibitors can reserve with a fixed hospitality arrangement. "They don't need to worry about setting up a chalet," he adds. "It's a turnkey package. Everything from catering to furniture to cleaners, drivers and waiting staff is provided."

What this means is that companies can "host guests for the entire day", explains Mahmoud. "It's a unique aspect of the show and a way of building long relationships rather than the rush and schedule of 30-minute meetings that you might have at other shows."

Other features of the show include a flying display that Mahmoud insists is "the best in the region".

That is because the Sakhir air base, where BIAS takes place, is some distance from any built-up areas. "The airspace is under our control and there are no restrictions. It means we can do three-and-a-half hours of flying a day," he says.

There is also a two-day conference programme on the exhibition floor (see P27) with Thursday hosting forums on commercial aviation as well as defence. Topics to be covered include sustainability, advanced air mobility, Airbus's fleet forecast, and air freight, while on the military side Airbus and Lockheed Martin are among the companies participating.

On Friday, the focus turns to diversity, equality and inclusion, and spaceflight. The former includes speakers from Etihad Airways and the Middle East chapter of Women in Aviation. Discussions on space law and meeting the United Nations sustainable development goals are on the agenda for the spaceflight forum.

Not part of the show but held as a precursor event is the invite-only 5th Manama Air Power Symposium, which was held in the capital's Sofitel Bahrain yesterday. With the theme Air Power in All-Domain Warfare, the symposium brought together more than 300 air force commanders, policymakers, and industry leaders from more than 30 countries.

While other Gulf states, including Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Qatar and even Saudi Arabia, have been doing their best to diversify their economies from a dependence on energy, Bahrain – which still relies on oil and gas exports for the bulk of its GDP – promotes itself as the simplest place in the region for a foreign individual or business to invest or do business.

There is no income or corporation tax and sales tax is only 10% on certain items; there are no minimum capital requirements for setting up a business, and 100% foreign ownership of assets is permitted. That means companies setting up in Bahrain do not need a local partner, as they do in some other GCC countries. Bahrain also has free trade agreements with more than 22 nations.

In 2021, Bahrain agreed with the Biden administration to set up a US trade zone at Salman Industrial City, near the airport, which would be a base for manufacturing and distribution companies. Building work began in 2022 and the complex is due to become operational next year. The kingdom has long had military ties with



This year's event is the seventh BIAS; the first edition took place in 2010

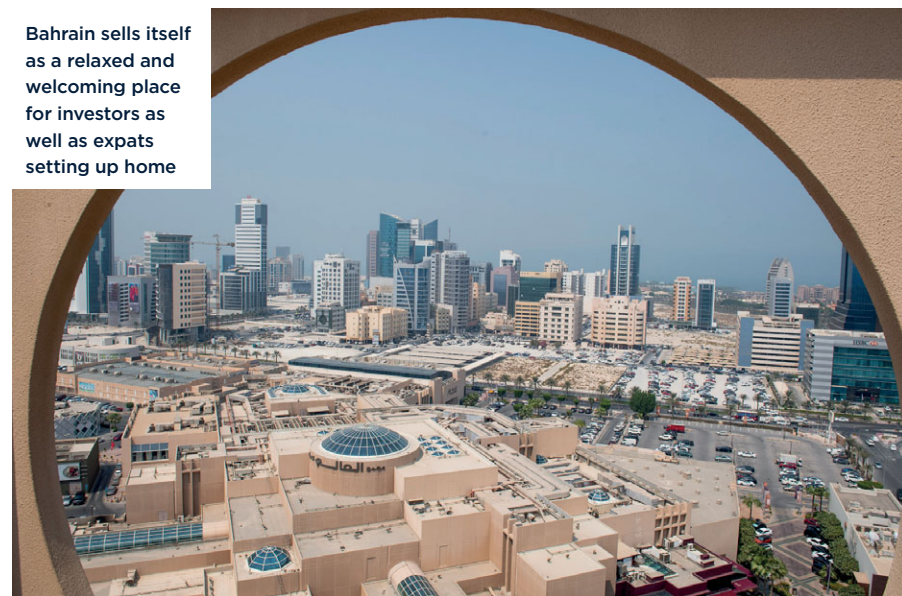
Washington DC, with the US Naval Forces Central Command and 5th Fleet based there.

Political, military, commercial, and cultural connections with another powerful country are just as important. Bahrain is joined to its large neighbour Saudi Arabia by the 24km-long King Fahd causeway, making the archipelago a popular leisure destination for Saudis, particularly in the eastern provinces. Go into any shopping mall or hotel car park and many of the cars will have Saudi plates.

Bahrain was also one of two GCC states – along with the United Arab Emirates – to sign the 2020 Abraham Accords that saw it formally recognize the state of Israel and establish diplomatic relations. While Israeli companies exhibited at the 2022 show, regional tensions following the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon mean they are not making an appearance this year. The Accords, however, remain in place.

In terms of setting up home in Bahrain, visitors often remark on its easy-going culture. While national dress is common, many Bahrainis choose to wear Western-style clothes, including business suits. Alcohol is permitted, pork can be purchased, and English is commonplace. While

Mahmoud: the next step is to persuade more companies to invest here



Bahrain sells itself as a relaxed and welcoming place for investors as well as expats setting up home

the vast majority of citizens are Muslim, there are churches and even a synagogue. You will find Bahrainis serving in shops and driving taxis, jobs often done by foreigners elsewhere in the region.

Geographically, Bahrain is tiny. An archipelago of more than 30 islands, there are three main inhabited ones – Muharraq, where the airport is, Sitra, and Bahrain island itself, all connected by bridges. Modern highways mean you can drive the length of the country in less than an hour. While most expats live in and around Manama, several beachside developments have been built on reclaimed land, broadening the choice of accommodation and locations available.

Although there are plenty of attractions – from cinemas and shopping malls to historic sites – the country's size means that, for expats, 'island fever' can be an issue. However, with dozens of flights a day from the main airport other parts of the Gulf can be reached in a short hop, and many European cities are close enough for a weekend break.

See our [What to do in Bahrain guides in today's and tomorrow's papers for ideas on what the country has to offer beyond the air show.](#)

Recent investments in new fighters and attack helicopters have strengthened the Royal Bahraini Air Force – and edged the nation ahead of GCC partners Kuwait and Oman in total fleet size

Air power on show



Service has now received 11 Block 70-standard F-16s, with five more examples to follow

Craig Hoyle

Bahrain's strengthened military capability is proudly on display at the show, with its air force's newest and most capable-ever combat aircraft taking a starring role.

The first three Lockheed Martin F-16s to be delivered to Manama in the airframer's Block 70 production standard touched down at Isa air base in March 2024. Their arrival followed the transfer of a lead pair of fighters to Edwards AFB in California last year, to support testing and training activities.

A trio of Block 70 jets are due to appear during the show's opening ceremony, as part of a flypast also to include six of the Royal Bahraini Air Force's (RBAF's) legacy Block 40-standard jets.

Eleven of Bahrain's 16 on-order aircraft have been delivered so far, with nine of these now operational in the country. Notably, early August

saw the arrival of a single-seat fighter with the registration 18-0006, which has the distinction of being the 4,600th F-16 built during the programme's more than half-century history.

The RBAF's remaining five aircraft are currently in various stages of production and assembly at Lockheed's Greenville site in South Carolina, the airframer says.

"Bahrain's F-16 Block 70 programme highlights the strength of partnership and heritage between the US government, Bahrain and Lockheed Martin, rooted in shared values spanning defence, economic, and cultural and social ties," the company says.

"Bahrain has a distinct history with the F-16 as the first operator in the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC], further distinguished by receiving the first F-16 Block 70," it adds.

Meanwhile, the RBAF's lead two aircraft remain based at Edwards AFB, where they are being flown with the US Air Force (USAF).

"The 416th Flight Test Squadron's rigorous evaluation of the F-16 Block 70 jets ensures that these aircraft meet the highest standards of performance and safety, which is crucial for the operational success of Bahrain's air defence forces," the USAF unit says.

"The Airpower Foundations CTF [combined test force] delivers relevant capabilities to our allied warfighters against the current threat environment through F-16 Foreign Military Sales test and evaluation, strengthening strategic partnerships and front-line deterrence," it says.

Capabilities introduced with the Block 70/72 standard include Northrop Grumman's APG-83 active electronically scanned array radar, plus "advanced avionics, a modernised cockpit with new safety features, advanced weapons, conformal fuel tanks [CFTs], and an improved-performance engine", Lockheed says.

The airframe's structural life also

has been extended to 12,000 flight hours: more than twice that of earlier F-16s, and equivalent to at least 40 years of operational use. Maximum take-off weight climbs to almost 21,800kg (48,000lb), with engine thrust in the 29,000lb (129kN) class.

Lockheed notes that the CFTs – which together increase internal fuel capacity by almost 1,360kg – provide extended range "without sacrificing the aerodynamic performance of the jet".

"This advanced aircraft significantly boosts Bahrain's deterrence capabilities and reaffirms the nation's commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty and ensuring regional stability," the company says. The RBAF's newest assets can deploy Raytheon AIM-120 AMRAAM and AIM-9X Sidewinder II air-to-air missiles and JDAM-series precision-strike weapons.

Lockheed – which in January 2024 marked the 50th anniversary of the YF-16 prototype's first flight – has

a production backlog including jets for Bulgaria, Jordan, Morocco, Slovakia and Taiwan. Turkey also is advancing towards confirming a planned 40-aircraft follow-on buy.

Speaking earlier this year, OJ Sanchez, vice-president of Lockheed's integrated fighter group, said the airframer expects to secure orders for another 300 F-16s over the life of the programme.

"There are a lot of countries with interest," he says, while describing the model as "an affordable, powerful and effective solution".

Meanwhile, Bahrain's other most significant recent procurement – of a dozen Bell AH-1Z attack helicopters – has been completed, with the RBAF receiving its final examples early last year. The service gave a home show debut to the type at the 2022 event, where one of the aircraft appeared in the static display.

"As a leader in the region, Bahrain's defensive capabilities will be further bolstered by the advanced technologies of the Viper," Bell vice-president and H-1 programme director Mike Deslatte said at the time of the final deliveries.

With a maximum gross weight of 8,390kg, the AH-1Z has a useful load of around 2,600kg, enabling it to carry weapons including Lockheed AGM-114 Hellfire air-to-surface missiles and BAE Systems APKWS II precision-guided rockets.

"Bell will support the lifecycle of the aircraft to ensure reliability, survivability and lethality on the modern battlefield," the company notes.

Thanks to its recent investments in the F-16 and AH-1Z, Bahrain's armed forces now operate a total of 132 military aircraft, FlightGlobal's soon-to-be-published 2025 World Air Forces directory shows. That marks an increase from 115 ahead of the 2022 show.

Including its legacy examples, the service has 28 F-16C/Ds in active use, including two-seat trainers. Its transport assets total two Lockheed C-130Js – acquired secondhand from the UK and fielded from 2018 – and a single Cessna 208 Caravan.

The RBAF's dozen AH-1Zs are supported by 22 older E/F-model Cobras, while its transport helicopter fleet comprises 21 Bell 212/412s and eight Sikorsky UH-60M Black Hawks.

A diverse training aircraft fleet totals 12 Northrop F-5s, six BAE Hawk 129s and three Slingsby T67M260s, plus eight AH-1P, three Bell 505 and four MBB BO105 helicopters.

Notably, Bahrain is the only member of the six-nation GCC grouping to operate the F-5, with the only other Middle East-region users being Iran and Yemen.

The remainder of Manama's military fleet counts two BO105s operated by the Royal Bahraini Navy.

Excluded from our analysis are a trio of BAE Avro RJ85/100 quadjets, which are employed by the air force in the VIP transport role.

The RBAF does not have any other current procurement programmes, but the oldest of its current assets include its F-5s, Bell 212/412s and BO105s, pointing towards potential



The delivery of 12 AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters was completed early last year



Host nation's air force now has 132 aircraft in operational use: up 17 since 2022's show

future equipment needs.

In terms of its regional standing, Bahrain's assets rank it fourth in fleet size among the GCC partners, who also include Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. But its recent additions have seen it edge ahead of Kuwait and Oman, which both have 128 military aircraft in service.

Once combined, the GCC's air power total is 2,106 aircraft. This includes 693 combat aircraft, 47 special mission, 28 tankers, 112 transports, 728 combat helicopters and 498 training aircraft/helicopters.

Bahrain accounts for just 6% of that combined strength, which is dominated by Saudi Arabia (44%), the UAE (26%) and Qatar (12%). Together, the GCC nations have

46% of the combined total of 4,595 military aircraft recorded as operational in the wider Middle East region. That sum also includes the inventories of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen.

GCC partner participation at the show includes Royal Saudi Air Force Boeing F-15SA and Eurofighter Typhoon combat aircraft, along with the service's Saudi Hawks aerobatic display team. Notably, the distinctive green and white-liveried Hawk 65s it currently employs are to be replaced with the newer 165 model, it was announced at the World Defense Show near Riyadh earlier this year.

The UAE, meanwhile, has sent F-16 and Dassault Aviation Mirage 2000-9 fighters to this year's event. In addition to its relationship with

GCC partners, Bahrain maintains strong links with the US military.

Building on their decades-long relationship, Manama and Washington, DC in late 2023 signed a Comprehensive Security Integration Agreement, which seeks to "enhance cooperation on issues ranging from defence and security to emerging technologies and trade".

Noting that Bahrain hosts the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, Washington says the nation "remains as one of the United States' longest-standing partners in the Middle East".

"The United States remains committed to Bahrain and the region," secretary of defence Lloyd Austin said at the time. "We will continue to work with you to push back against all threats to regional stability both from states and non-state actors."

As evidence of their partnership, the USAF's 378th Air Expeditionary Wing staged exercise Ballast Cannon 24.8 with the RBAF from 9 July.

"As a routine exercise occurring nearly quarterly, this iteration supports rapid expeditionary capabilities by integrating air-to-air training objectives between the Royal Bahraini Air Force and US Air Force aircraft and operational support personnel," the unit says.

USAF assets involved in the manoeuvres were F-16s deployed from Aviano air base in Italy, and a Boeing KC-135 tanker, with activities including "aerial refuelling, coalition command and control, and tactical integration".

"The bilateral training focuses on strengthening the bonds between coalition forces and building a foundation for future engagements in support of the combined defence of the Arabian peninsula," the USAF says. It adds that such activities "enhance strategic basing capabilities and strengthen coalition interoperability".

Appearing at the show for a second time, the backbone of the Pakistan air force – its JF-17 fighter – is touting its enhanced capabilities, including in Block III guise



Latest version of type has increased payload capacity for weapons

Thunder struck

Craig Hoyle

The Pakistan air force's (PAF's) JF-17 Thunder fighter is making a repeat appearance at the show, with three of the jets in attendance – including one in the Chengdu/Pakistan Aeronautical Complex-developed type's new Block III standard.

Operated by the service's 8 Sqn, or "Haiders", the latest-model example on view in the static display area is visiting from the PAF's Masroor air base. Reformed earlier this year and now fully operational, it is its second unit to receive the Block III-standard JF-17, after 16 Sqn.

Powered by a Klimov RD-93 engine, the fighter's newest version boasts a Nanjing Research Institute of Electronics Technology KLJ-7A active electronically scanned array radar, in addition to an increased weapons load.

On display with a broad array of air-to-air and air-to-surface weapons, plus anti-ship missiles, the Block III aircraft has eight hardpoints, including a new twin-store station on

its outer under-wing pylon.

The type also features a fixed in-flight refuelling probe and an enhanced self-protection suite. The latter includes a new missile approach warning system, and an OESP automatic chaff and flare dispenser mounted atop its tail.

Deployment of the JF-17s to Bahrain was completed with support from a PAF Ilyushin Il-78 tanker, with the journey from Masroor completed in roughly 2h 30min.

The Haiders were among participants in the recent bilateral Indus Shield-Chinese exercise conducted with the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF). Staged from Rafiqi air base, and wrapping up in early November, the activity also involved participation by some of the PAF's Chinese-built Chengdu J-10C fighters.

PLAAF assets involved in the manoeuvres included J-10 and Shenyang J-16 fighters, along with Shaanxi KJ-500 airborne early warning and control and YTG-9 electronic warfare aircraft. Also supporting the training activity was a deployment by China of the HQ-22

air-defence system.

The PAF says the recent exercise's objective was "to foster a robust understanding of modern airpower employment dynamics among the participating air forces... validating interoperability, and to further consolidate the existing strategic partnership between the two nations".

"Indus Shield-Chinese has maximised the warfighting potential of both the participating air forces, alongside fostering mutual understanding and respect," the service adds.

Pakistan now has 123 JF-17 combat aircraft in service, with another 35 on order, and also employs 25 as dedicated trainers.

"It is the backbone of the PAF. We rely on it," one of the service's pilots tells *Flight Daily News*. "It is war-tested," he adds. Referring to the recent exercise with the PLAAF, he says: "It helps us to sharpen our tactics and stay up to date". The services train together on an annual basis in order to maintain this relationship.

With the help of its air force, Pakistan is promoting the JF-17

to potential new international operators. And while the type has not been acquired by China, it has begun to pick up significant export momentum.

"Equipped with state-of-the-art avionics, enhanced weaponry, and advanced electronic warfare systems, the JF-17 Block III boasts superior manoeuvrability, extended range, and enhanced combat capabilities," the PAF says.

Myanmar has so far fielded seven JF-17s, with another nine on order, while Nigeria's air force has received three. Azerbaijan, meanwhile, recently announced an order – brokered by Pakistan – for a dozen JF-17s, including four two-seat trainers.

Baku's commitment emerged in late September, when president Ilyam Aliyev toured a PAF aircraft at the Azerbaijan Defence Exhibition. "The jets have already been integrated into the arsenal of Azerbaijan's air force," the nation's defence ministry said.

A trio of PAF-operated JF-17s made the type's debut Bahrain show appearance in 2022, drawn from the Masroor-based 2 Sqn "Minhasians".

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Bahrain is a leading hub for air freight and infrastructure investments at the airport are set to consolidate its status as a global crossroads

All go for cargo

Murdo Morrison

Just as the Suez Canal is a major artery for global shipping, so a significant proportion of the world's air cargo that originates in China and Southeast Asia and is destined for businesses and consumers in Europe and North America travels through the Middle East. In the same way as they have used their geographical advantage to develop giant passenger transit hubs, several of the Gulf's airports market themselves as strategic staging posts for air freight operators.

They include Bahrain, which wants to build on its long relationship with German parcels giant DHL and easy access between its airport and seaport to increase its share of this global trade. Like its Gulf counterparts, it also feels it can tap into a growing regional market for e-commerce, particularly in next-door Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

DHL's Boeing 767-300 freighters, with their distinctive yellow paint scheme and red logo, are a familiar sight at the airport. Bahrain is one of the company's four international hubs. The airport is also home to fast expanding narrowbody operator

Texel, as well as MENA Cargo, which is 49% owned by Singapore's Asia Cargo Network.

Meanwhile, FedEx Express, which has had a presence in Bahrain for more than 30 years (although its Middle East nerve-centre is at Dubai South), has recently moved in as the first tenant of a new express cargo village that airport operator BAC is developing on the north side of the runway. With phase one of the project complete, BAC plans to announce details of the second phase before the end of the year.

DHL's Bahrain-based fleet has almost doubled in size since the turn of the decade when it had six 767-200s under its local air operator's certificate (AOC). Today, helped by the boost pandemic stay-at-home mandates gave to e-commerce, that has grown to 10 newer 767-300s, with the fleet supplemented by two 737-800s on wet lease from Texel and painted in DHL colours.

There are two main drivers behind the growth, suggests vice-president aviation Richard Gale. The first is that almost no Western-registered aircraft have been able to over-fly Russia since changes in flight routings following the Ukraine conflict. This has made it more convenient for long-haul air freight to position through the Middle East.

A second factor is that "this part of the world is really emerging when it comes to e-commerce", says Gale. While Bahrain remains primarily an air freight hub for consolidating items destined for other continents, 20% of all consignments arriving in the country from the East are for recipients in Bahrain itself or parts of Saudi Arabia that can be reached by road (Bahrain is connected to its much larger neighbour by the King Fahd Causeway).

Gale says DHL's original intention was to simply replace its half dozen 200s with newer -300s. However, sustained high demand after the pandemic prompted it to add four more – eight of its new aircraft are owned with the other two dry-leased from ATSG. The -300s – all ex-American Airlines passenger aircraft – are around half the age of its former 1980s-era -200s.

The younger, larger aircraft have "completely changed the game for us", says Gale. "We never before had to be concerned with ETOPS [extended-range twin-engine operations approval, which allows twinjets to fly a route that involves being further than 1h flying time on one engine from an alternate airport]."

In terms of range, the -300s "can push" 9h flying time at 60t, as

opposed to around 6h at 40t on the -200, so effectively doubling the previous capacity. "It means the destination portfolio has been flipped on its head," says Gale, with the Bahrain-based aircraft now flying twice-daily to Hong Kong, daily to Singapore, Milan, Leipzig and Nairobi, and three times a week to Bangalore.

DHL Aviation's Bahrain-based business also connects with its sister DHL air operations: a 777 arrives daily from its sister hub in Cincinnati. The Texel 737s give it a more cost-effective option for flights to other Gulf destinations and as far as Beirut and Turkey. "The relationship with Texel keeps it simple as we both have the same regulator," says Gale.

DHL's current Bahrain headquarters shares a building with its airside cargo consolidation centre – getting to Gale's desk involves traversing a walkway over loops of conveyor belts filled with packages. However, the plan is to build new offices which will be ready by January 2028, leaving the current premises as the automated distribution hub. Gale is hoping to include on-site passport-control facilities to save time for pilots, who currently must go through the main airport terminal.

Heads of agreement have also been signed with the airport to build a line-maintenance hangar large enough for two 767-300s or a

777X – "We're future-proofing," says Gale, who adds that the roughly \$85 million investment is "the final piece of cement in our presence in Bahrain".

DHL employs 150 pilots in Bahrain out of a total staff of 380. Although Gale admits that the pilot market has tightened in the past year after the dearth of experienced flightcrew seen in the immediate recovery from the pandemic, he says that working for a cargo airline is still a highly attractive job for many.

"It depends what people want to do," he says. "If they want a quieter life, flying 45 to 50 hours a month, then this job is ideal. If you work for a major airline, you might be flying 100 hours. So, if your objective is to boost your hours as a first officer and reach captain, then we are probably not right for you."

Right now, Gale is entering his busiest season of the year as the Christmas season and Chinese New Year approach, and people start stepping up their spending on e-commerce. This month and next services to Hong Kong will step up to four times daily. "It's at times like this that it becomes clear that we are right in the middle of one of the world's biggest trade routes," he remarks.

Over on the north side of the runway, Texel – a Bahrain-based airline founded by New Zealander John Chisholm in 2013 and run by

his son George – deals largely with another aspect of the air freight market: specialist charters. It is, however, also involved in the parcels market, via its wet-lease relationship with DHL.

It operates three 737-800BCFs (Boeing Converted Freighters), two of which are under contract to its neighbour, as well as two 737-700 FlexCombi hybrid passenger/cargo aircraft from Pemco World Air Services. The flexible layout

combines a cargo area with a passenger cabin that can be configured for 12 or 24 passengers, perfect, maintains George Chisholm, for niche jobs such as equine transport or transporting specialist machinery, where teams travel with the load.

At the last air show, Texel displayed on its stand an in-flight horse box – complete with life-size plastic racehorse – to promote its increasing presence in this

highly niche segment: the sport is enormous in the region and many wealthy Gulf Arabs have their own animals or stables. The timing was apt as the racing season begins in November and runs until June.

Texel became the launch customer for the FlexCombi when it took delivery of the first example in 2020 – the second followed a year later. The Bahrain company had worked with Tampa-based Pemco on achieving US Federal Aviation Administration approval for the programme.

While Texel is phasing out an older 737-300, Chisholm hopes to add a fourth -800 on the Bahrain AOC, depending on market demand. The oil and gas market has been lucrative, where the volume offered by the 737-800 is crucial for the large pieces of equipment that need to be transported.

For many of the 737-800's customers in this segment, time and reliability rather than maximising payload are key, says Chisholm. A lighter load means the type can reach Bahrain from Phuket in Thailand, for instance, without a stop, and can continue to Europe after refuelling and switching crew. "It makes the -800 a really efficient charter vehicle," he says. "The aircraft has given us new options." Chisholm says its ACMI (aircraft, crew, maintenance and insurance) agreement with DHL provides



DHL's 767s are a common sight at Bahrain's airport



Texel says 737-800BCF is a highly efficient charter vehicle

Texel Air



Gale: This part of the world is emerging fast as a market for e-commerce

Bahrain's main port is just a 20min drive from the airport allowing shippers to combine sea and air freight



Sergey Bogomyako/Shutterstock

I steady income from the scheduled services it flies, “plugging the gaps” regionally to allow DHL’s widebodies to focus on intercontinental routes. “We are very happy to have DHL as a customer,” he says. “It’s a big thing for us as a group.”

Texel, which has its own hangar and headquarters on the airport perimeter which it has recently expanded, will not be moving to the new cargo village. “We’re not really in the [e-commerce] business,” says Chisholm. However, he is confident of picking up ad hoc business from tenants there once the development is up and running.

The company operates the largest maintenance facility at the airport providing Part 145 services to its own fleet and third-party customers. It also offers aircraft parking and tooling rental services.

Chisholm Enterprises, which owns Texel, has also taken the Texel brand beyond Bahrain, establishing an AOC in New Zealand. Because of a bilateral agreement with its neighbour, the AOC allows the Auckland-based entity to operate freight services within Australia, a more lucrative market.

Texel Air Australasia operates a fleet of five 737-800s and won a seven-year contract in June this year with parcels and logistics firm Team Global Express, under which it will operate three aircraft in its customer’s colours and one in the Texel livery. It is also operating internal New Zealand services between Auckland and Christchurch for a local parcel operator as well as some charter flights.

In October, Texel’s New Zealand subsidiary announced it had

completed the first EDTO (extended diversion time operations) 120min flight on a 737-800 BCF between Melbourne and Perth on behalf of Team Global Express.

It follows Texel’s approval of EDTO 120 flights from the New Zealand regulator. Earlier this year the FAA gave the green light to the 737-800BCF to fly ETOPS flights of up to 180min.

ETOPS and EDTO capability are needed to both fly across the Australian continent and the Tasman Sea. John Chisholm, who is chairman of Chisholm Enterprises, says the “really important” development for the business will also allow it to open new routes, including to remote south Pacific islands.

BAC says it is investing BD24 million (\$63 million) in the 25,000sq m (269,000sq ft) cargo village, which

comprises 10 modular warehouses, 19 business units, and aprons. Logistics is one of several high-growth sectors identified in Bahrain’s 2020 Economic Vision strategy and BAC says the cargo village will be one in a series of infrastructure projects across the country.

The cargo village will have a road link to the nearby Khalifa bin Salman container port, making it easier for freight forwarders to ship heavy consignments from East Asia and then have them broken up for air freight.

This, claims Bahrain’s government, allows shippers to save time and avoid the potential bottleneck of the Suez Canal. A 30min drive in the other direction will take trucks to the King Fahd Causeway, entry point to Saudi Arabia. ▶



FedEx

FedEx is the first tenant of the new cargo village

The show’s conference programme comprises four forums taking place across two exhibition floor theatres. The themes are commercial air transport, defence, space, and diversity and inclusion

Murdo Morrison

Tomorrow morning’s conference programme offers a choice between a focus on airlines and airports or defence. The programme in Theatre 1 begins with a keynote address at 10:00 from Kamil Alawadhi, regional vice-president for Africa and the Middle East at airline association IATA, followed by a panel discussion on how airlines and airports are innovating to meet the needs of passengers. It features two of the region’s airline leaders: Jeffrey Goh, chief executive of Gulf Air Group, and Capt Abdulmohsen Salem Alfagaan, chairman of Kuwait Airways.

At 11:00, Usman Mastan, vice-president sales for Africa and the Middle East at Airbus will be running through some insights from the airframer’s latest 20-year Global Market Forecast, while at 11:20 there is another panel discussion, this time on the region’s path to net zero, which includes Jeff Ovens, from synthetic fuel start-up SAF One; Mohamed Yousif Albinfalah, chief executive of Bahrain Airport Company; Marina Evans, co-founder and general director of French electric aircraft developer VoltAero; and Shannon Scott, vice-president sustainability and environment at Emirates.

After them comes another panel on the impact of advanced air mobility on airlines and airports, where the speakers are Romain Favennec, UAM [urban air mobility] strategic programme lead with SITA, the airline-owned specialist in information technology and communications, and Mohammad Kushan, who is the senior representative Middle East with the US Federal Aviation Administration, which has just released a new category for powered-lift aircraft. In the final keynote of the day, Ishaq Ishaq, head of business development at the Economic Development Board (EDB) of Bahrain will talk about initiatives to consolidate the kingdom’s status



Airbus

Airbus will be talking about its 20-year Global Market Forecast tomorrow

as an air freight hub, such as the airport’s new Express Cargo Village.

Over in Theatre 2, the spotlight is on defence, with Lockheed Martin’s vice-president for customer requirements Gen (rtd) Gary North beginning the programme at 10:00 by talking about the future of combat air power and the pivotal role of advanced technology in shaping defence capabilities. Other highlights include a presentation by Travis Ruhl, director of international business development for airborne combat systems at L3Harris, on electromagnetic spectrum dominance in modern warfare. At 11:00, an Airbus representative will outline the European company’s partnership with the Bahrain Air Force.

On Friday at 10:00 in Theatre 1,

Jane Hoskisson, director of talent, learning, engagement, and diversity at IATA delivers the opening keynote for the diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) programme. Next comes a panel discussion on advancing DEI in the aerospace, space and defence sectors, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa region. Speakers include Sheriza Bazari, DEI manager with Abu Dhabi-based airline Etihad, and Melvat Sultan, president of the Middle East chapter of Women in Aviation.

The final session at 11:15 looks at how the industry can develop talent, including those equipped with skills for delivering sustainable aviation and future flight technologies. The panel comprises Qadar Sarfraz, chief executive of Airman’s Ground,

an online flight training academy; Nada Al-Saeed, chief of strategy at Bahrain’s EDB; and Fahad Ibne Masood, a senior analyst at the Advanced Air Mobility Institute, a non-profit that promotes awareness of and standards in this emerging segment.

The same day in Theatre 2, space is the subject, with that programme’s opening session at 10:05 delivered by Rosanna Margarita Hoffmann, associate legal officer with the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA). She will then moderate a session on the significance of space laws so that governments and private companies can pursue exploration and commercial projects and tap space resources while preserving the environment of outer space and making sure there is a level playing field.

Joining her on that panel will be Hessa bint Ali Al Khalifa, a senior legal researcher with Bahrain’s National Space Science Agency; Marlene Losier, a principal and expert in international law at law firm Losier Gonzalez; and Ilgar Abdullayev, a space law advisor to the chairman of Azerbaijan’s space agency, Azercosmos. A second panel, at 11:35, has as its topic “Harnessing space to meet United Nations sustainable development goals in the Middle East”. The panel includes speakers from Italy’s Space Economy Evolution Lab (SEELab), UNOOSA, the NSSA, and the International Center for Remote Sensing of the Environment. ▶



Gulf Air Group’s Jeffrey Goh is on a panel focused on innovation among airlines and airports



Mohamed Yousif Albinfalah of Bahrain Airport Company will be among those discussing the industry’s net-zero journey



Gen Gary North (rtd) of Lockheed Martin provides the keynote in Theatre 2 on the opening day

US Air Force

While Bahrain has its share of excellent restaurants and shopping malls, you might want to sample some of the country’s more diverse cultural, sporting and historic attractions during your visit to the kingdom

Time for a change

Murdo Morrison

1 Bahrain National Museum
Sitting next to the main bridge between Manama and Muharraq, Bahrain’s National Museum is less than 40 years old, having been inaugurated in 1988. What it contains goes back a lot further. The building itself, with its white travertine façade, is striking, but inside is a host of artefacts from six millennia of the country’s history. Long before the Islamic era, modern Bahrain was part of the Dilmun civilization, which, not unlike the Gulf today, was the crossroads of trade routes linking the wider Middle East to the Indian subcontinent and beyond. The museum’s Hall of Dilmun traces the history of Bahrain from the Neolithic period to the late Dilmun era around 400 BCE and includes displays of pottery and temple treasures. Later, Bahrain, known at the time as Tylos, became part of the emerging Greek empire and retained its status as an important trade hub and centre of the pearl industry. The museum’s Islamic section includes objects from the Islamic era that began in the 7th century, including from the Al-Khamis mosque, one of the oldest places of worship in the Gulf.



Bahrain National Circuit



Al Fateh Grand Mosque

2 Bahrain Fort
Bahrain’s most visited attraction, Qal’at Bahrain, is located on what was once the nerve-centre of the Dilmun civilization and was more recently a Portuguese fortress – the Portuguese empire having ruled Bahrain for most of the 16th century. Easily reachable from Manama in a 10min taxi ride, the fort, which sits on top of an artificial hill, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Opened to the public in 2008, the area includes five exhibition halls and a seaside café that offers impressive views of the palm groves that surround the fort. As you enjoy your coffee you can wonder that you are sitting in a place that has been occupied by humans almost continuously since 2300 BCE.

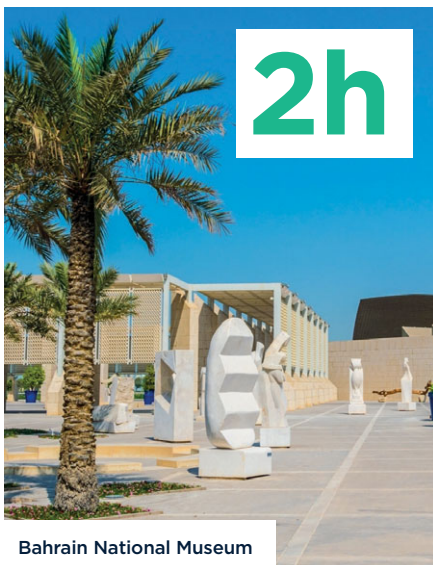


Bahrain Fort

India. It can accommodate 7,000 worshippers. It is open to visitors from 9am to 4pm (except Fridays) and tours are conducted in a variety of languages, including English and French. The mosque’s library contains more than 7,000 books, many more than 100 years old.

3 Al Fateh Grand Mosque
You don’t have to be of the Islamic faith to visit Bahrain’s most important and impressive mosque. Located next to the Al Fateh highway in Juffair, a district of Manama, so also easily reached from most city centre hotels, it has a dome constructed of 60t of fiberglass, and is built from Italian marble, with teak wood doors from

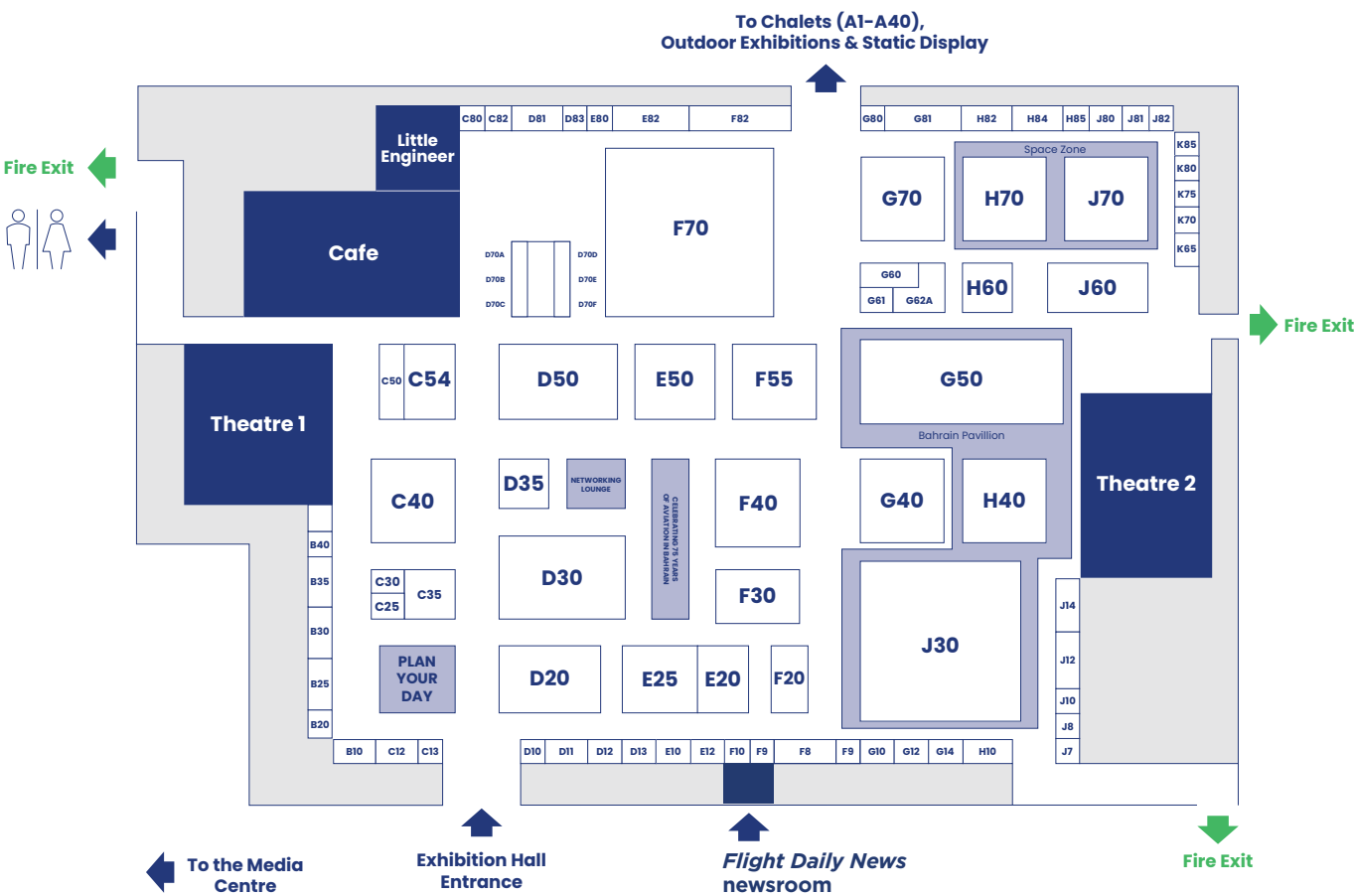
4 Bahrain International Circuit
If you prefer your attractions a bit racier, what better way to spend some spare hours than touring the Bahrain International Circuit, which hosts the annual Formula 1 Grand Prix, as well as many other motorsports events. While you might be tempted by the



Bahrain National Museum

early bird ticket offers to return for next April’s Grand Prix, you can also pay to go behind the scenes of the track, which opened ahead of the country’s first F1 race in 2004. Tours start at 10am and 2pm (pre-booking is required) and include stops at the main tower – offering a 360-degree view of the track and the surrounding area – as well as the race tower, where stewards monitor every aspect of the race. You can also visit the media centre – which houses 500 members of the press – as well as the track itself, where last March Red Bull Racing’s Max Verstappen stormed to victory after leading every lap. ▶

Find an exhibitor



Hall exhibitors

B10	TREPEL Airport Equipment
B20	AIIESEC in Bahrain
B25	Vatel Bahrain International Hospitality School
B30	Arab Open University
B35	Ahlia University
B40	Bahrain Polytechnic
C12	Cobus Industries
C13	Shenzhen Yowoo Electronic Technology
C20	Plan Your Day - Information Desk
C25	Saudi Aviation Club
C30	Ninety Nines Female Pilots Organization
C35	American University of Bahrain
C40	BTV
C50	Defense Technology Equipment
C54	Bell Textron
C80	Jazirah Aviation Club
C82	InnoTaqa
D10	Shenzhen Sinosun Technology
D11	Simmac Technologies
D12	Bliss-Fox
D13	Charlatte Manutention
D20	Beyon
D30	Bahrain Tourism & Exhibitions Authority
D35	Kuwait Airways
D50	MENA Aerospace
D70	Adam's Universal

D70	Mideast Aviation Academy
D81	Conduce Group
D83	HMK USA
E10	EAS - European Airline Solutions
E12	S3 AeroDefense
E20	Al Salam Bank
E25	Airbus
E50	British University of Bahrain
E80	Horizon Aviation Services
E82	SITA
F6	Air Arabia Academy
F8	RSAF Saudi Hawks display team
F9	Official Show Dailies
F10	JBT - Oshkosh
F20	Arabian Petroleum Supply Company
F30	UAE General Civil Aviation Authority
F40	Bahrain International Airshow 2026
F55	Genesis (First Motors)
F70	Gulf Air Group
F70	Gulf Air
F70	Bahrain Airport Company
F70	Gulf Aviation Academy
F82	Lockheed Martin
G10	TLD MEAI
G12	Mallaghan
G40	GACA - General Authority of Civil Aviation
G50	Ministry of Interior
G60	Kallman Worldwide
G60	GE Aerospace
G60	Marvin Test Solutions

G60	Shield AI
G60	Sourcehere
G70	Alpha Star Aviation Services
G80	Henan Liuliang New Material
G81	L3 Harris
H10	DOLL
H40	Bahrain Defence Force
H60	ASFAT
H70	Bahrain National Space Science Agency
H82	Joint Rescue Coordination Center
H84	Brilliant Remote Sensing Labs
H85	YASA
J7	SAP Media
J8	Shenzen Smgo Technology
J12	Electro Air
J14	Aviaco
J30	Bahrain Airport Services
J60	Bahrain National Guard
J70	UAE Space Agency
J80	DefenseHere
J81	Global Air Navigation Services
J82	Xerox
K60	Emirates
K65	Arabian Aerospace
K70	Skyways Training Company
K75	AMC Aviation
K80	AFCENT/AIA
K85	Aviation Home
K85	Qatar Flying Club

Chalet exhibitors

A1	ADS & FIL UK Partnership Chalet
A1	Viasat
A2	Indian Air Force
A3	UAE Air Force
A4	Royal Bahraini Air Force
A5	Royal Saudi Air Force
A6	Civil Aviation Authority Bahrain
A7	Pakistan Aeronautical Complex
A8	DHL
A9	Joramco
A10	Texel Air
A11	C5 Capital USA
A11	Axiom Space
A11	Height Capital Markets
A11	IP3
A11	Otto Aviation
A11	RapidFlight
A12	AFCENT/AIA
A13	Corporate Hospitality Chalet
A14	Indra
A15	Defense Technology Equipment
A16	Otokar Otomotiv ve Savunma Sanayi
A17	CFM International
A18-	Gulf Air Group
A20	
A21	Ministry of Interior
A22	EDB Bahrain
A23	Leonardo
A24	BAE Systems
A25	Alpha Star Aviation Services
A26	Rolls-Royce
A27	Etihad Airways Engineering
A28	Lockheed Martin
A29	Bapco Energies
A30	Royal Jordanian & Embraer
A31	Thales
A32	DFS Aviation Services
A33	Aloula Aviation
A34	MENA Aerospace
A35	Beyon
A36	Bahrain Airport Services
A37	National Bank of Bahrain
A38	Ministry of Transportation & Telecommunications
A39	Gulfstream
A40	Chevron Bahrain

Outside exhibitors

OE101	Tawazun
OE101	Al Jundi
OE101	AMMROC
OE101	Capital Events
OE101	EDGE Group
OE101	GAL
OE101	Mira Aerospace
OE701	Genesis (First Motors)

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