

AVIATION TIMES



COVER STORY

Taking off in the
New Decade



FACE TO FACE WITH

Col (Retired) Sanjay Julka
CEO - Technical, Club
One Air



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Face to face with Col (Retired) Sanjay Julka

CEO - Technical, Club One Air

By: Manchumi

Club One Air is an air charter company in India based on the fractional ownership model. Based in Delhi, Mumbai and Visakhapatnam, it is Asia's first aircraft fractional ownership company. It launched its operations from Delhi in August 2005 and Mumbai in March 2006.

To know more about their plans for 2020 and the trends observed in the chartered flights' sector we met Col (Retired) Sanjay Julka, CEO - Technical, Club One Air.

Col. Julka has over 29 years of experience in the aviation sector, both in defence and business aviation. During his career in the Army, besides flying over varied terrain including the highest battlefield of the world, Siachen Glacier, Col Julka has held many renowned appointments. Just before retirement, he was the Senior Aviation Advisor to Army Commander in the South Western Command where he strategized employment of 30 helicopters in war and peace, at the borders of Punjab and Rajasthan. Prior to Club One Air, he was the Chief Executive Officer of one of India's biggest aircraft charter companies, India Flysafe Aviation Limited.



Can you tell us about the potential that exists for the growth of the Business Aviation (BA) market in India?

The potential of Indian Business Aviation can be gauged by comparing the economy of the country with the largest fleet of Business Aviation aircraft (USA) with that of India. USA has a GDP of 22 Trillion USD and 20000 aircraft. Compared to this India has a GDP of approx. 3 Trillion USD and 500 business aviation aircraft. Hence it should have 3000 Business Aviation aircraft and is 2500 aircraft short of its potential.

What is the present fleet status of Club One Air? Are planning for any expansion?

Fleet Status of Club One Air (COA): five Falcon 2000s (8 to 12 seats mid-size jets), one Bombardier CRJ 200 (18 seats mid-size jet), one Citation Excel (8 seats small-size jet) and two Citation CII (6-7 seats very small-size jets).

You would notice that we have jet aircraft in three segments, two in a very small segment, one in a small segment and six in the mid-size segment. Our plan is to first consolidate our holding to only two segments and amongst those two segments we would like to



have similar aircraft. We plan to have Falcon 2000s in the mid-size segment and Citation Excels in the small size segment. Therefore, we would be selling other aircraft and replacing them with Citation Excels and Falcon 2000s. We have our own MRO. Currently, all maintenance except for paint, interiors, engines and major Checks of Falcon 2000s are being performed by us. For C Check / Major check of Falcon 2000s, we are sending our aircraft to foreign MROs (due to lack of facility in India). Once we achieve the right scale, we would upgrade our MRO capabilities, adding Major Check capability for Falcon 2000s. Time is ripe for us to develop this facility in India and take on the major checks of not only our fleet of Falcon 2000s but also other Falcon 2000s in India, belonging to other Indian Business Aviation Companies.

Club One Air has been a pioneer in its field. How do you see your business prospects in the coming years?

With such great potential in the market, we see COA leading the charter

industry especially in the domestic sector and neighbouring countries in the ME and SE Asia region. Our Company has been steadily adding aircraft to its fleet. We are soon to reach the right scale to try out various marketing models and cost reduction strategies. Post these; we see the growth happening at a rapid pace. I have already mentioned our mid-term plan for maintenance. For the marketing, COA would soon open up multiple bases in India and offer more flexible options to customers. I am very positive that COA would be the major market shareholder of business jets in India.

Which segment of Charters appears to be growing the most?

The mid-size segment appears to be growing at the best pace. There can be many reasons attributable to this trend.

With the improvement in design, the mid-size segment aircraft can now land at shorter airfields, therefore clients who hired smaller aircraft due to airfield restrictions, no longer need to compromise on the size of the aircraft. Even the airfields are getting

upgraded, extended and being made night capable.

At times customers opt for mid-size segment aircraft because the per-seat cost of a mid-size segment aircraft (8 to 12 seats) is similar to that of a small size segment (6 to 8 seats). Since a mid-size segment aircraft is more spacious than a small size aircraft, customers have a natural preference towards a mid-size segment aircraft.

The comfort and space of a mid-size segment aircraft are disproportionately excellent compared to a small size segment aircraft and similar to the large size segment. The cabin of Falcon 2000 (mid-size) is as wide and high as a Falcon 7X (large size). Hence the only reason for a customer to hire a Falcon 7X over a Falcon 2000 would be the transcontinental range whereas, a customer will want to hire a Falcon 2000 over a Cessna Excel (small size), because of range or comfort or both.

What is the network of Club One Air? Are you planning to expand?

All but one of our aircraft are based in Delhi. One aircraft is based in



Udaipur. We have an MRO at Delhi airport. We are soon to have another MRO at Udaipur. As explained above, post-consolidation of our fleet, we are looking to open up a base in the south. Our customers include High Net worth Individuals and VIPs, mainly industrialists and businessmen, politicians, film stars and sports stars. We are also into medical evacuation flights and a significant number of our customers hire our aircraft for medical evacuation from within India as well as abroad. We have two sales teams working round the clock, one at Delhi and the other at Mumbai. We have also maintained a very good working relationship with other charter brokers and there are many instances where we collaborate in ensuring the success of a flight by taking assistance from them and vice versa.

Do you foresee any engagement with RCS (Regional Connectivity Scheme) for Business Aviation (BA)?

I was personally disappointed to see that the UDAN scheme could not well

utilise the spare capacity of Business Aviation aircraft. The mathematics model that worked out for the scheme was based on a 50-100 seat aircraft like ATRs and Q400s. The Business aviation community typically flies 8-10 seat aircraft. Although some business aviation companies have ventured into UDAN with 8-10 seat aircraft, the math simply cannot make them sustain. All these companies have initiated the

sector popular, raise demand and then bring in a bigger aircraft like an ATR or a Q 400. This scenario is possible but the Government ought to be wary of the chances of failure of this approach because these companies are incapable of sustaining a schedule. A sector cannot become popular if there are disruptions in the schedule because of the lack of reserve aircraft or weather shutdowns. The government chose to combine two different schemes into one scheme and as a result, they could not help us utilise our spare capacity.

I feel that the Government should have come out with two parallel schemes, Regional Connectivity and Remote Connectivity. Regional connectivity should have been from Tier II to Tier I cities and Remote connectivity from Tier III to Tier II-cities. Scheduled airlines like IndiGo and SpiceJet could have taken on the regional connectivity with 50 to 100 seat aircraft (ATR, CRJ-100, Q400s etc) and current spare business aviation capacity could have been utilised for remote connectivity. The terms could have been different with greater Viable Gap Funding and waivers allotted to Remote Connectivity for obvious



reasons. Government schemes need to be planned with liberal sustainability models and the Government needs to be more magnanimous in that respect. I see a trend wherein, the schemes announced are not attractive enough which only delays the good and bold decisions taken by the leadership of the country. UDAN and Air India Disinvestment are two such examples.

Do you think private business jet airports are a feasible idea with a majority of the airports congested?

Private airports or private terminals are the need of the hour. If London can have seven airports then there is no reason why Delhi or Mumbai cannot. There is a capacity issue at Delhi and Mumbai airports and daily tons of fuel, engine and airframe hours are being wasted over these cities, in the holding traffic. Irrational agreements signed with private owners of these two airports have led to business aircraft coming under threat. Anytime airport bursts from capacity, the first casualties are helicopters and second the business aviation aircraft, that's what is happening in Delhi and Mumbai, leading to extremely difficult times for charter companies. The new airports in both the cities are at least seven years late.

What are the offerings that you provide to your clients to make COA their preferred choice?

The first principle being followed is to give clients the best dispatch rate which we do by having the highest standard of maintenance (in house, ensuring matching response by our engineers to meet the demands of the customer), similar fleet and keeping aircraft in reserve. Well-rehearsed drills and efficient operations ensure on-time performance. A "WOW Experience"



for the clients is ensured by clean and exquisite interiors which are always kept in best possible state, by taking care of all their needs the moment they step out of their house/office till they step in the house/office at the destination, making each customer feel like the owner of the aircraft by preparing the cabin as per their taste. Another marketing strategy would be offering one-way charters wherein the customer will not need to pay for the ferry legs. This as explained above, would be possible when we open new bases.

How do you see this industry evolving in the next five to 10 years?

I had heard ministry talk about giving special loans to acquire aircraft at a low rate of interest (don't know where we have reached there), cutting of taxes on ATF, taxes on MRO/spares are being gradually brought down. We have 100 operational airports compared to 75 in

2014 and almost every month we keep seeing some or the other airport being commissioned with new routes being added under UDAN and otherwise. Aircraft component manufacturing is being seen, Air India is getting privatised, billionaires are taking over airports, GAGAN routes are being prepared, the regulator is becoming well equipped with inspectors; like this many things are happening. What I am not happy about is the pace at which the change is happening. Correct pace will happen only if the culture and mindset get changed. Bureaucracy should reflect the boldness of the leadership in their decisions, aircraft must be kept in the air and technology must be exploited. The tax holiday is a bold step and taxes on charter (GST), ATF, MRO, spares and customs need to go for some time. It is a bold step and it is only this step that can help us reach our potential. □