

# Civil Aviation Sector Growing and Opening Up to Private and Foreign Investment

**I**n a recent visit to Kuwait International Airport, WSMR was welcomed for two scheduled meetings with Engineer Nabil Al-Zamel, Deputy Director General for Aviation Safety and Air Transport Affairs and Engineer Mahdi Aldakeel, Director of Projects Department at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), to discuss Kuwait's civil aviation sector in line with the international aviation community. Emphasis is on Kuwait International Airport's current developments, as well as challenges ahead and opportunities for foreign investment in the industry.

**WSMR: What are some key developments in Kuwait's Civil Aviation sector recently?**

**Engineer Al-Zamel:** A major change is the DGCA's new Open-Sky Policy effective since 2006; accordingly we now have an open-skies agreement with the U.S. and other countries. This is a tremendous, positive step forward and we are interested in signing more agreements as this policy will enhance KIA's international image as well as attract more visitors.

In addition, the Kuwaiti government decided to have three new airlines operate at Kuwait International Airport: a cargo airline (Load Air), a low cost airline (Al-Jazeera) and Kuwait National Airlines.

As you are aware, DGCA launched the Air-Taxi Services, which is operational since 2003. The new airlines aim to rent aircrafts and the new cargo airline hopes to form an alliance with major international cargo-carriers.

**WSMR: What are some of your goals?**

**Engineer Al-Zamel:** DGCA's fundamental responsibilities to reach its goals is restructuring the civil aviation sector and aiming to convert the Directorate to an independent body facilitated with more commercial orientation. We trust this will allow more efficiency resulting in high revenues. One key change that has been accomplished is the outsourcing of a number of services, including ground handling and catering at KIA and we are hoping to outsource other possible activities to involve the private sector more.

**WSMR: What are the major projects underway at Kuwait International Airport?**

**Engineer Aldakheel:** DGCA is in the process of a major expansion at KIA which will boost our passenger-handling capacity from the current seven



million per year to 20 million. The new terminal will have around 40 gates, compared to 10 currently operational.

As we all have noticed, most international terminals are not just airports but shopping malls as well. We hope KIA will accommodate adequate services and facilities for our passengers and visitors to utilize and enjoy a user-friendly gateway.

The New General Aviation Terminal which was inaugurated in April 2008, will have the capacity to handle private aircraft, Air-Taxi Services and helicopter traffic. Future development plans include building new runways to handle the new jumbo aircrafts, and a third runway specifically for cargo and military aircrafts. Additional developments, such as building a new access road to the airport and other facilities and a major new aircraft-maintenance facility are promising to turn KIA into a regional aircraft-maintenance hub.

KIA New Cargo Facilities will allow a boost in our cargo-handling capacity from the current 250,000 tons per year to 700,000 tons.

Simultaneously, a new storage facility will handle around six million tons per year.

**WSMR: How can foreign investors get involved in these projects?**

**Engineer Aldakheel:** The Kuwaiti government will take responsibility in handling some of the initiatives, nevertheless DGCA is committed to involve international investors in many of these projects. Aircraft-maintenance hub requirements and foreign contractors are welcome to bid for tenders.

**WSMR: Over the next five years, what changes do you anticipate in Kuwait Civil Aviation sector?**

**Engineer Al-Zamel:** In fact, we aim to increase efficiency and reduce operating times while also maintaining exceptionally high standards of safety and security regulations. Last but not least, human resources is a major factor in our goals for growth. DGCA similarly seeks to invest in recruiting more qualified and experienced staff to be able to cope with the expansion of this industry and to meet the tasks and duties ahead of us for the expected restructuring of the aviation sector in the state of Kuwait.

