

# Safety and pollution top of the agenda as Paris Airshow opens

(MENAFN – Gulf Times) Aviation executives descended on the Paris Airshow yesterday with pledges to improve transparency over plane safety in the wake of the Boeing 737 MAX crisis and to reduce emissions.

Few blockbuster products or orders are expected at the world's biggest aerospace show, which brings together nearly 2,500 firms from 49 countries, and 290 official delegations, including government leaders and military chiefs.

With passenger traffic slowing this year, the atmosphere at the fair, where arch-rivals Boeing and Airbus vie for aircraft orders, was markedly less self-congratulatory than in recent years.

President Emmanuel Macron inaugurated the event at Le Bourget airport after flying in on a hulking grey Airbus A330 refuelling tanker operated by the French Air Force.

He then attended the unveiling of a full-size model of the new fighter jet that France and Germany are promoting as a symbol of their efforts to boost European defence autonomy at a time of growing strain in ties with the United States.

The stealth plane is part of the ambitious Future Combat Air System (FCAS) that includes next-generation drones and missiles, which would help reduce the EU's long reliance on US planes and equipment.

The cooperation framework was later signed by the defence ministers of France, Germany and Spain, so far the only other EU nation to join the project, which aims to have its new

plane in operation by 2040. 'European countries tend to buy American.

We're offering a European plane for Europeans, independent of American technologies, Dassault Aviation CEO Eric Trappier, whose firm is building the plane alongside Airbus, told CNews television earlier yesterday.

Macron then toured the vast exhibition halls at Le Bourget, where dozens of companies are touting their efforts to make flying cleaner amid criticism of airlines' carbon emissions.

Airbus officially unveiled its A321 XLR jet, the latest iteration of its hugely popular single-aisle A320, which can now cross the Atlantic thanks to increased fuel efficiency.

That makes it an option for airlines which currently have to use bigger, fuel-hungry twin-aisle planes on longer routes.

The US-based Air Lease Corp has signed a letter of intent to buy 27 of the planes, with deliveries to start in 2023.

Executives at Airbus's archrival Boeing faced a fresh barrage of questions about its handling of the 737 MAX crisis, following the two deadly crashes since October which together claimed 346 lives.

'We want to leave no stone unturned in the investigations into an anti-stall system suspected of causing the crashes, Boeing's head of commercial airplanes Kevin McAllister told journalists yesterday.

Critics accuse Boeing of failing to properly test a system that used just one sensor to determine if the 737 was at risk of stalling, and of failing to adequately inform and train pilots on its use.

McAllister said the update would use two sensors, but it has yet to submit a fix to regulators, who have grounded the plane indefinitely.

'We are very confident that the three layers of protection we are planning with the software update will prevent anything like this happening again, McAllister said.

He also vowed that any lessons learned from the inquiries into why the new system failed to attract the attention of safety regulators would be applied across Boeing's civil and defence operations.

'Our priority is doing everything to get this plane safely returned to service. It is a pivotal moment for all of us, he said.

Boeing has estimated the crisis will cost it \$1bn, but the bill is likely to climb the longer the planes stay on the ground.

Boeing now has 140 737 MAXs parked on its tarmac waiting for delivery, and has had to reduce monthly production to 42 planes from 52.

Both Airbus and Boeing have suffered a wave of order cancellations as airlines grapple with slowing passenger traffic growth since the start of this year.

And air cargo shipments, often an indicator of passenger traffic trends, have been slumping so far in 2019, reflecting the trade tensions prompted by US President Donald Trump's move to impose tariffs on several European and Chinese imports.

If the aviation market continues to soften, Airbus and Boeing could suffer their first disappointing year after more than a decade of solid growth driven in particular by the soaring numbers of people flying in Asia.

The two industry leaders can take comfort from jam-packed order books after hefty revenue growth last year, when their combined deliveries exceeded 1,600 planes.

Analysts say nearly 40,000 planes will be in service by 2038, double the industry's current fleet.

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