UAE MARKS 83 YEARS OF AVIATION PROGRESS

News / Airlines

Eighty-three **years** ago today, a single-propeller British-owned Imperial Airways plane carrying four passengers landed in Sharjah, the first to carry airline passengers to what is now the **UAE**.

The anniversary is marked by Civil Aviation Day in the Emirates – a day in which the government seeks to reflect “the concerted efforts by the **aviation** industry in the past decades resulting in remarkable **progress** and cutting-edge development”, Sultan Al Mansouri, Minister of Economy and chairman of General Civil Aviation Authority, said a year ago when announcing the day. “All these factors have contributed to the success we see today.”

Muna Al Ghanil, head of airport service quality for Abu Dhabi Airport Company (Adac), which oversees Abu Dhabi International Airport, said reaching a leadership position was about overcoming the challenges of constant growth.

Abu Dhabi International Airport has more than quadrupled its capacity in under a decade, from five million passengers in 2006 to an anticipated 24 million passengers by the end of ?this year.

The pace is only expected to increase with the Midfield Terminal opening in 2017. Officials are predicting doubled capacity, up to 30 million passengers in the new terminal alone, driven largely

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by the rapid expansion of Etihad Airways.

In August, 2.2 million passengers passed through the airport, more than any previous month in its history, a 17 per cent increase from the year before.

With extra capacity comes extra responsibility –an airport is only as successful as its customer service is satisfactory.

It is Ms Ghanil's job is to understand the customers and find ways the airport can serve them better.

"They all need help," said Ms Ghanil. "First-time travellers, those with language barriers, people travelling with families, they all have their own psychology."

Ms Ghanil, who holds degrees in computer science and business administration, said Abu Dhabi International Airport is unique because its expansion is incomparable to other major airports like Heathrow in London or Charles de Gaulle in Paris.

In a month, Ms Ghanil will put out more than 150 surveys seeking to gauge customer satisfaction – from whether there is enough seating in the terminals to the timeliness of kerbside assistance.

"Daily challenges will always be here," Ms Ghanil said. "You have to work hard."

Arwa Omar bin Haiden's first job at Abu Dhabi International Airport was a customer service agent.

"It was the most wonderful job I ever had," she said.

Almost 10 years after that first airport job, and four promotions later, Ms bin Haiden now oversees all 150 customer service agents in her role as the senior manager of operations, projects and contracts for Adac.

She said the aviation sector had allowed her to "have wings".

She has a degree in fashion design, not necessarily something equated with a career in the aviation industry, but she said her background in the arts drew an unexpected parallel for the variety of challenges she faced.

"Working in the airport is very colourful," Ms bin Haiden said.

"Our culture is full of colours, we speak many languages, we seek to understand. That is the image the airport would like to reflect."

Iman Marzouqi, acting head of human resources, is the only woman on the 10-person executive leadership team at Adac. She became "hooked on aviation" when she realised how airports could play a role in enhancing Abu Dhabi's interests.

With a background in civil industries, Ms Marzouqi said her mission was to promote the perception of the UAE as a welcoming country, and instil that belief in employees.

She is trying to make Adac, which has 1,140 employees – of which 240 are women and about 680 are Emirati – an "employer of choice" in the Emirates.

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Ms Marzouqi, one of six children raised by a single mother who was widowed, credits her mother's influence for her work ethic.

Her mother was the first woman to start an Islamic library in the Emirates, and she raised a doctor, two engineers, and two executives. Ms Marzouqi has similar aspirations for her five children.

"The world is coming" to Abu Dhabi, she said. "I wish for my kids to know that we're working hard now so they can work harder and better. I hope they are ready and keep an open mind."

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