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Growth challenges in Asian commercial heli market

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The Asian commercial helicopter market is growing, though the region faces a number of infrastructure challenges, depending on the country in question, according to analysis by a provider of business aviation services to the continent.

The demand for VIP, corporate and private helicopters has been particularly strong in China, Indonesia and the Philippines, said Nadav Kessler, rotary sales director for Asia-Pacific at Asian Sky Group, a provider of business aviation services and analysis.

Kessler was speaking ahead of the launch of the company's Asia-Pacific Region Infrastructure Report 2017, which will be published in July and examines business aviation development and challenges across the region.

Each of these three major markets have **different opportunities and challenges**, Kessler said. While there is a number of infrastructure challenges in the Philippines, for instance, 'the existing facilities are fairly conducive to the use of helicopters for VIP transport, with plans to develop additional suitable support in major cities and their surroundings', he explained.

In Indonesia, there are not enough approved helipads and landing sites to enable convenient operations, Kessler said. In China, **challenges surround a lack of existing infrastructure**, along with regulatory and airspace restrictions, he said.

'Demand is on the rise, but infrastructure is developing at its own pace, despite the Chinese government's large-scale development plans,' he said. 'Other countries in the region have not seen as much recent change in demand or in infrastructure development.'

According to the report, the Asia-Pacific business aviation industry is unique, 'dealing with a low density of aviation infrastructure fulfilling the growing business jet and helicopter fleets, under land development constraints and regulatory issues'.

Helicopters are more operationally versatile than business jets, and so do not require as much large-scale investment in infrastructure, Kessler said.

'However, in urban areas the development of helipads on buildings, hospitals and in open public areas is an important part of essential infrastructure,' Kessler added. 'Heliports do not require as much space as a fixed-wing airport would require, so with limited landing space, good facilities can still be established to accommodate multiple helicopters and operators.'

As most helicopters in the region do not fly internationally, helicopter facilities do not usually require the same customs and immigration set-ups that jets do. However, while business jets can undergo maintenance sometimes thousands of miles from their base, this is not the case for helicopters, 'which require more regional and local support in order to be conveniently maintained and operated'.

Looking forward, Kessler said Asian Sky Group does not expect to see significant investment in business helicopter infrastructure throughout the region, though he pointed out that 'several organisations and associations have **identified gaps in certain countries** as an issue and are lobbying for change'.

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