



### Thai 1; good choice

Thai Airways may stand a chance of regaining its former service and operating excellence under its new president. He is Piyasvasti Amranand.

Most recently Piyasvasti was chairman of the advisory panel to Kasikornbank Bank's CEO. He also has (all important) political connections from the time he headed the country's National Energy Policy Office in the 1990s as well as being a minister of energy. Piyasvasti graduated from Oxford University in the UK, and later acquired a degree at the London School of Economics.

All this gives him a background in mathematics, energy, and politics – almost a wish-list for heading Thai Airways. However, the main problem for Thai has not been incompetent CEOs but political interference. Unfortunately, there are no clear signs that this may end. Indeed, political interference may be getting more profound, see next item.

There are some clues as to what Piyasvasti might do in his new job. True, he issues the expected platitudes – “We must continue to cut costs, radically improve our operational performance and enhance the efficiency and returns of every division within the airline.”

But he also adds that his commercial strategy will focus on revenue enhancement. And what he calls “quickwins” – increasing customer satisfaction in areas that are achievable immediately without additional investment – such as improving the quality of inflight service catering and inflight reading materials.

Thai is woefully behind Asia's better airlines in terms of aircraft interiors, but Piyasvasti expects aircraft refurbishing to be completed within two years. He has a ‘Mission 100’ that aims to restore Thai to be consistently among the top three airlines in Asia for overall customer experience.

Standards at Thai 20 years ago were only a fraction below leaders Cathay and Singapore, alongside Malaysia Airlines. Both Malaysia and Thai have fallen far since then, and can broadly

be considered level with airlines such as Asiana, Eva, and newcomers such as Jet.

### Thai 2; bad choice

Akapol Sorasuchart, 50, has been appointed president on Thailand's convention bureau. He was named in October to start work this month.

His appointment appears to be a political not a merit move. He has been a career politician, with positions including deputy secretary-general to the prime minister, and he was proposed for the MICE post by the deputy prime minister.

Akapol has no travel experience. Nevertheless he is expected to bring a 25% growth in the number of MICE visitors to Thailand in 2010.

That announcement seems close to what Akapol has condemned elsewhere – “biased” reporting, of which he accused the media earlier this year. Because if he does achieve 25% growth, the resulting total would still be 25% below the peak achieved in 2007.

This presidential post has heavy political backing, which presumably explains why a person friendly to the ruling party was selected, rather than an industry professional. The position is approved by the cabinet under the prime minister's supervision, no less. We wonder why? Head of state-owned airline, perhaps yes. Head of the state-sponsored destination marketing body, perhaps yes. But head of the convention promotion bureau?

Akapol's contract is for four years. We would expect him to stay for that long if the ruling party stays in power, as he has no other potential role in politics proper. But if a change in ruling party happens within four years (which seems likely?), we would expect him to go, contract or not.

### The Germans are coming

Following the appointment of a German national to run Aer Lingus, it is now the turn of BMI, which may be changing its name back to British Midland.

This move is understandable as the

airline was bought earlier this year by Lufthansa. But it is a bad move in terms of staff relations, who generally want to believe that not much will change, or, more personally, that there is not much of a chance that they will lose their jobs.

The new man is Wolfgang Prock-Schauer (who is actually Austrian, not German), who was CEO at India's Jet Airways. At the start of this month he is due to become deputy CEO at BMI, then CEO from next month, taking over from Nigel Turner, who gets kicked upstairs as deputy chairman.

Prock-Schauer has worked primarily with Austrian Airlines, but his first CEO post was the Jet job in 2003.

His CV claims his involvement in Austrian's takeover of Lauda – which should be a negative factor in that Lauda was doing badly, so either it was a bad move for Austrian or it was to shut out a competitor. And at Jet he must take responsibility for the airline's rapid international expansion. That was the easy part; he has left before resolving the tough part – adjusting what is now known to be over-expansion, and how to make profit from a new, wide, and expanded network.

Prock-Schauer, 53, is married and has three children.

### Briefs

- **Barbara Beyer**, head of Avmark, died last month of a heart attack following routine surgery.

She was the daughter of Mort Beyer. He was a respected airline executive, including a director role with Modern Air, before moving on to create Avmark, an aviation consultancy. Barbara joined her father's company in 1975, but following a family fall-out in the 1980s, Mort left and established a rival, which eventually became MBA (Morten Beyer Agnew); he is still involved with MBA.

In 1989 Barbara bought a controlling interest in Avmark.

- El Al's CEO **Haim Romano** is due to leave the airline before year-end. He has been in dispute with unions.