

Air Tanzania has made a down payment of Sh596.3 billion (\$258.7 million) for the purchase of five aircraft to bolster the national carrier Air.

The orders include cargo planes, which are all expected to be delivered before the end of 2023.

The funds were approved by the President Suluhu's government despite heavy losses incurred by the carrier under a revival programme initiated by former and late president John Magufuli and effects of Covid-19 pandemic.

The planes, once they arrive in the country, will raise Air Tanzania's current fleet size to 16.

The airline's stable comprises two Boeing 787-8 Dreamliners, two other Airbus A220-300s and five Bombardier Q-400/Dash 8-400s.

Zanzibar President Hussein Mwinyi disclosed the plans to purchase the additional five aircraft while receiving the latest Airbuses, named 'Zanzibar' and 'Tanzanite' respectively, on behalf of President Samia Suluhu at Zanzibar's Abeid Amani Karume International Airport on October 8.

He said the process was already "under way" but did not offer details.

The announcement coincides with a pledge by the President Suluhu's administration to push her predecessor's plans to revamp the airline and bolster Tanzania's aviation industry through new investment.

Air Tanzania announced four new regional routes to be launched next month from Dar es Salaam to Bujumbura, Ndola, Lubumbashi and Nairobi.

Dar-Bujumbura flights are scheduled to start on November 8 while the Dar-Ndola and Dar-Lubumbashi routes will be launched on November 18 and Dar-Nairobi on November 26.

The airline currently provides regional flights to Entebbe, Harare, Lusaka, and Hahaya and a weekly cargo flights to Guangzhou, China.

It suspended the Dar-Mumbai route in May due to concerns over a spike in Covid-19 third strain cases in India, but resumed them at the end of August.

Flights to Johannesburg were also cancelled over Covid-19 travel restrictions.

According to the airline's spokesperson, Josephat Kagirwa, domestic flight frequencies will also be increased to busy destinations such as Dodoma, Kilimanjaro and Mwanza while flights to Mtwara in southern Tanzania will be resumed after a "temporary" halt to allow for airport facility improvements.

Despite a massive outlay of close to \$600 million on new aircraft, Air Tanzania's revival has continued to flounder, a situation exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.