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# Japan's Tethers on Privileged Business Fliers

By SONIA KOLESNIKOV-JESSOP

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SINGAPORE — Tomoyoshi Tsuchiya, chairman and chief executive of the Japanese construction company Tsuchiya Gumi, regularly uses one of the company's two Gulfstream jets for business trips. But Mr. Tsuchiya finds it hard to keep the planes operating at their full potential. "I've been lobbying the government for a long time, but it's still not easy to land in Tokyo," said Mr. Tsuchiya, who also runs a ground handling service company for private jets. "Conditions in Japan for business aviation are still very difficult."

Japan may be a leading global economy, but limited airport access, high landing fees and cumbersome regulations have kept its private aviation industry surprisingly underdeveloped. Years of lobbying for deregulation by the Japan Business Aviation Association have so far had little effect.

Japan is "extremely backward when it comes to corporate aviation," said Logan Ravishankar, chief executive of MyJet Asia, a Singapore-based operator that charters private planes to Japan for celebrities and business executives. "They simply don't understand the concept of private jets. The permits are very difficult to get, there is no flexibility and the charges are ridiculously high."

Landing and ground handling fees for a Gulfstream jet in Japan are \$10,000 to \$12,000, compared with \$3,500 in Singapore or Hong Kong, Mr. Ravishankar said. "They said they want to encourage corporate aviation, but they've done absolutely zero to help. You have to jump hurdles for everything."

Still, recent news of plans to turn Haneda Airport in Tokyo into a 24-hour hub, with 90,000 slots a year allocated to international flights, revived hopes that business aviation could finally grow. In April, too, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism said it wanted Narita Airport near the capital to accept more flights by domestic and low-cost carriers and business jets. The ministry said it would review airport revenues and expenditures with a view to reducing landing fees.

The opening of a new runway at Haneda, in October, should allow more business flights there, said Scott Fesler, director of business development at JAS Co., Mr. Tsuchiya's ground handling company.

"We will get more slots per day, and the request time will be cut from the current seven days to just three," he said, citing Japanese media reports.

People in the Democratic Party government of Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, in power since last year, have said it wants to cut slot request lead times at Haneda even more, to allow same-day approval for private international flights, Mr. Fesler said.

"We expect the official government announcement to confirm this information in June," he said. "The new party in power in Japan seems to be more responsive to the needs of business aviation."

Mr. Ravishankar, however, remains skeptical. "They've been telling us this for the last 10 years," he said. "Even if the time for a request permit comes down to three days, it's still too long. The whole point of using a private jet is to be able to change things at the last minute. It's all about flexibility."

Landing restrictions have been a major problem for the industry. Most international business jets operate out of Tokyo Narita, where flights are allowed only between 6 a.m. and 10:59 p.m. and depend on slot availability. Landing permits, moreover, require three days' notice.

Another problem is ground access. It can take two hours to drive between Narita and central Tokyo, which for many executives defeats the purpose of using a private jet. Haneda Airport is a more convenient 30-minute drive from the center, but international landings and takeoffs there are tightly restricted to the early morning and require seven working days' notice.

Yet another obstacle is a lack of dedicated customs and immigration gates at both airports. "Unlike elsewhere in Asia, after landing at Narita or Haneda, you must queue up in line with everyone else who landed at the airport," said Justin Firestone, Asia-Pacific president of the aerospace manufacturing company Hawker Beechcraft. That, he said, is "hardly a V.I.P. experience."

This all helps to explain why recent data from LAAS International, an aviation industry publisher, showed just 84 business jets registered in Japan — including 52 serving the military — and only 141 registered Turboprop planes.

"Japan is the last major superpower in the world to widely accept the benefits of business aircraft," Mr. Firestone said. "This is shown in the many unrealistic rules and regulations of bureaucracy that do not exist in neighboring nations."

Recent moves to develop the old Nagoya Airport in central Japan for business use were mildly encouraging, he said. The airfield was phased out of service for most international traffic in 2005, but parking facilities have been expanded, a small private jet lounge has been added and landing access has been made easier.

Nagoya "is a working example for the government of what it means to support private aviation," Mr. Firestone said. "It's not just about landing slots, it's the private jet terminal, the maintenance. You need to have all the infrastructure."

Even so, landing hours remain limited to 14 hours a day — and Nagoya is 90 minutes by bullet train from Tokyo.

For business travelers, 24-hour operation is a must, Mr. Ravishankar said. "Last year, 68 percent of the flights we did were after 9 p.m. People do their business, have a bite and then fly. It's really about maximizing their day."

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