

TAM 'aid' comes under fire . . .

BRIAN HOMEWOOD/RIO DE JANEIRO

BRAZIL'S THREE national airlines, Varig, Vasp and Transbrasil, have asked the Government to abolish a tax which they say effectively forces them to subsidise one of their main rivals.

The airlines pay 3% of the value of each ticket sold into a regional aviation fund, which is used to subsidise unprofitable regional services. TAM and Rio-Sul, a Varig subsidiary, have been the main beneficiaries of the fund, which was created in 1976 when both were small companies flying only on regional routes.

The three airlines claim that TAM now effectively offers a large number of national flights with brief stops at provincial airports to get around a regulation that prevents it from flying non-stop between state capitals.

The airlines argue that the dis-



Rivals are objecting to TAM's financial assistance

advantage of having to stop *en route* is wiped out by the fact that TAM operates out of Sao Paulo's central Congonhas Airport, while they are forced to use the distant Guarulhos Airport.

TAM argues that it flourished by flying routes in which the national airlines never showed any interest. In September, the airline took over Paraguayan carrier LAPSA and

now offers international flights from Brazil using its own Fokker 100s chartered by LAPSA.

Varig, Vasp and Transbrasil also want the Brazilian Government to back down on a 9% ticket tax imposed at the beginning of October. Varig estimates that the tax will cost the airline \$90 million a year, and has joined others in threatening fares rises. □

TABA cuts fleet as its routes are pruned

BRAZIL'S CIVIL aviation authority (DAC) has begun re-distributing among other carriers 12 routes no longer operated by troubled regional airline TABA.

TABA reportedly owes \$3.5 million to some 700 employees who were made redundant two years ago, and it has reduced its fleet from eight Embraer EMB-110 Bandeirantes and two Fairchild FH-227s to two Bandeirantes.

TABA's route from Rio de Janeiro's Santos Dumont Airport to the neighbouring city of Belo Horizonte is being handed to a pool operated by Interbrasil, Pantal, Passaredo and Total. Five daily flights will be run in each direction using an AI(R) ATR 42. Penta Transportes Aereos will also operate two routes in northern Brazil. TABA originally operated 20 routes, but several have been operated by Rio Sul and Brasil Central since March. □

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