

China firm wins order for 30 homegrown passenger planes

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China's main commercial aircraft company said on Tuesday that it had received a single order for 30 of its C919 passenger jets, bringing the total ordered to 430 planes.

State-backed Commercial Aircraft Corp. of China (COMAC) said in a statement it signed an agreement for the latest order with CMB Financial Leasing, a unit of China Merchants Bank, on the sidelines of the country's premier Zhuhai airshow.

Financial details were not disclosed.

The order marks a vote of confidence in the C919, a 158-168 seat narrow-body jet that would compete with the Boeing 737 and the A320 of European consortium Airbus.

An Airbus executive played down the potential competition, saying the China market was big enough to support more companies.

"We will take that rule: only competition can make the company greater, more competitive and efficient," Eric Chen, Airbus China president and [chief executive officer](#), told a news conference.

The sky is big enough "to maybe contain more than two manufacturers", he added.

COMAC has so far announced only one order by a foreign entity, GE

Capital Aviation Services, a subsidiary of General Electric, the US firm that co-owns the joint venture providing engines to the C919.

Workers recently started assembling the fuselage of the first C919 at a factory in Shanghai, and COMAC plans the first test flight at the end of next year.

"The C919 is still on schedule now," a COMAC spokesman told AFP.

But with significant technological challenges, some industry officials said the project could miss that deadline.

"Production has started. There's going to be a delay in the official schedule, in my opinion," one of the suppliers to the C919, who declined to be named, told AFP.

COMAC also announced an order for 20 of its regional jets, the 78-90 seat ARJ21, from Tianjin city-based Comsys Aviation Leasing Co. The order brings the total to 278, according to a separate statement.

The ARJ project is years behind schedule, with deliveries originally planned for 2009.

COMAC plans to certify the ARJ with China's own civil [aviation](#) authority before year-end, but approval from the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is necessary before it can fly in most countries.

"The ARJ21 will get certification from CAAC (Civil Aviation Administration of China) next month," the COMAC spokesman said.

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