China's CE-25A electric aircraft makes its first piloted flight

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News

The CE-25A – a 10-tonne-class (maximum take-off weight 10 t) electric commercial aircraft developed by the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC) to China's CCAR-25 airworthiness standard – made its first piloted flight on Saturday, 14 November 2026, at Binzhou in Shandong province, East China, Xinhua and China Daily reported. With two pilots and a flight-test engineer on board, the test lasted 57 min 46 s, including 16 min 38 s in the air, covering about 60.4 km. The 'flew without a pilot' angle refers to the earlier phase: the aircraft first flew unmanned and autonomously on 2 February 2026 and completed 19 unmanned autonomous test flights. It is designed to fly either autonomously or with a pilot; the targets are 19 passengers, a cruise speed of 300 km/h, a cruise altitude of 2,400 m and a range of 400 km. It uses distributed electric ducted fans mounted on the wings and was developed with battery maker CATL and Shanghai Jiao Tong University. The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) has accepted its type-certificate application; it cannot carry paying passengers until certified.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Aircraft	CE-25A – 10-tonne-class electric commercial aircraft (max. take-off weight 10 t)
Developer	COMAC; with CATL and Shanghai Jiao Tong University

Point	Details
First piloted flight	14 Nov 2026, Binzhou (Shandong)
First unmanned flight	2 Feb 2026; 19 autonomous tests in all
Crew	2 pilots + 1 flight-test engineer
Capability (target)	19 passengers; 300 km/h; 400 km range
Propulsion	Distributed electric ducted fans on the wings
Certification	CAAC accepted type-certificate application – not yet certified

Background

- COMAC: this Chinese State-owned company was set up in Shanghai in 2008. Its ARJ21 regional jet and C919 narrow-body airliner (first commercial flight on 28 May 2023, China Eastern, Shanghai–Beijing) are meant to rival Boeing and Airbus; the wide-body C929 is under design. Electric aircraft such as the CE-25A aim at short intercity hops with low emissions.
- Pilotless / autonomous flight: 'flying without a pilot' can mean remote piloting from the ground or autonomous flight in which on-board computers fly a pre-programmed path. The CE-25A is an 'optionally piloted' design – testing is done unmanned to cut risk before people fly in it. Large passenger airliners still fly with at least two pilots; no pilotless aircraft is yet certified to carry passengers.
- Aviation regulation: the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), set up under the 1944 Chicago Convention, is a UN specialised agency headquartered in Montreal, Canada; 7 December is International Civil Aviation Day. Each country's regulator gives a 'type certificate' to a new aircraft model – CAAC in China, and in India the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) under the Civil Aviation Ministry. The 'Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024' replaced the Aircraft Act, 1934 from 1 January 2025.
- Batteries and electric flight: the big hurdle for electric aircraft is battery energy density – many times lower than jet fuel – so only small, short-range planes are feasible for now. In India, CSIR–National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL, Bengaluru) is developing the 19-seat 'SARAS Mk2' light transport aircraft and the 'Hansa' trainer.

Tamil Nadu link: No. 45 Squadron 'Flying Daggers', the first IAF squadron flying the indigenous Tejas light combat aircraft, was formed at Bengaluru on 1 July 2016 and moved to Air Force Station Sulur in Coimbatore district in 2018; No. 18 Squadron 'Flying Bullets' (2020), the second Tejas squadron, is also based at Sulur. The Coimbatore–Sulur area is also growing as a hub of small aerospace and defence manufacturers.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

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What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Aircraft: CE-25A – 10-tonne-class electric commercial aircraft (max. take-off weight 10 t); Developer: COMAC; with CATL and Shanghai Jiao Tong University; First piloted flight: 14 Nov 2026, Binzhou (Shandong); First unmanned flight: 2 Feb 2026; 19 autonomous tests in all.

What is the background to this news?

COMAC: this Chinese State-owned company was set up in Shanghai in 2008. Its ARJ21 regional jet and C919 narrow-body airliner (first commercial flight on 28 May 2023, China Eastern, Shanghai–Beijing) are meant to rival Boeing and Airbus; the wide-body C929 is under design.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. Which narrow-body airliner of COMAC, maker of the CE-25A, entered commercial service in 2023?

A) ARJ21

B) C929

C) MA700

D) C919

Answer: D – Explanation: C919 – 28 May 2023, China Eastern (Shanghai–Beijing). ARJ21 is a regional jet; C929 a wide-body in design; MA700 an AVIC turboprop.

2. India's indigenous light transport aircraft 'SARAS' (Mk2 – 19 seats) is being developed by –

A) CSIR-NAL

B) HAL

C) ADA

D) DRDO-ADE

Answer: A – Explanation: CSIR–National Aerospace Laboratories, Bengaluru; it also built the 'Hansa' trainer. ADA designed the Tejas.

3. The Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024 – India's law covering certification of new aircraft types – replaced which Act?

A) AAI Act

B) Air Corporations Act

C) Aircraft Act

D) Anti-Hijacking Act

Answer: C – Explanation: The Aircraft Act, 1934. The new law took effect on 1 January 2025; DGCA certifies aircraft. AAI Act – 1994; Air Corporations Act – 1953.

4. Where is the headquarters of ICAO, which sets global standards for civil aircraft?

A) Geneva

B) Montreal

C) Chicago

D) Paris

Answer: B – Explanation: Montreal (Canada). A UN specialised agency born of the 1944 Chicago Convention; 7 Dec is International Civil Aviation Day.

5. No. 45 'Flying Daggers', the first squadron of indigenous Tejas fighters, is based at which IAF station in Tamil Nadu?

A) Thanjavur

B) Tambaram

C) Madurai

D) Sulur

Answer: D – Explanation: Sulur (Coimbatore) since 2018; formed at Bengaluru in 2016. The second Tejas unit, No. 18 'Flying Bullets', is also at Sulur.

Sources: Xinhua (english.news.cn, 14–15 Nov 2026); China Daily (15 Nov 2026); China.org.cn (15 Nov 2026); Al Jazeera (C919, 28 May 2023); Business Standard (Tejas, 1 Jul 2016; Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 31 Dec 2024); The Week (Sulur, 10 Nov 2018). © Shanmugam IAS Academy.