

Train tickets in short supply over annual travel peak

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Transport authorities have taken contingency measures to ensure the smooth movement of people during the world's largest annual migration that started on Saturday, but train tickets are still hard to get because of the gap between supply and demand.

Railway authorities will arrange 1,242 more trains every day on average during the 40-day peak travel season around the Lunar New Year holiday to meet the needs of an increasing number of migrant workers, the Ministry of Railways said on its website on Sunday.

A total of 4,516 passenger trains completed 5.2 million journeys on Saturday, the Ministry said. The ministry arranged 454 temporary trains on Sunday and predicted a total of 5.4 million passenger journeys will be handled.

A record 3.4 billion trips are expected to be made during this year's Lunar New Year travel rush, which lasts for 40 days from Jan 26 to March 6, as Chinese return home for family reunions during the Spring Festival holiday, the most important traditional Chinese holiday, which falls on Feb 10 this year.

The country's rail network is expected to handle 225 million trips, while long-distance buses will complete 3.1 billion passenger trips, which combine to account for 99 percent of the overall national capacity, according to the National Development and Reform Commission.

China's airlines adopted a similar approach by increasing the combined transport capacity to handle 35.5 million journeys, up 5.2 percent from the same period last year.

Transport authorities across China should improve contingency plans targeting bad weather such as extreme low temperature, fog and heavy snow, and transport enterprises are urged to intensify driver training to ensure safety, Feng Zhenglin, vice-minister of transport, said ahead of the peak travel season.

Chinese have traditionally favored road and train transportation, especially trains, for their safety and lower prices.

With a large number of people traveling during the period, getting a ticket, especially a train ticket, has been difficult every year. People often have to wait in long queues in railway stations, even over night.

To help migrant workers get train tickets, railway authorities have encour-

aged them to buy tickets in groups (normally with 10 or more people) so they can get tickets before the official date when tickets begin to be released, the Ministry of Railways said.

To facilitate ticket buying, people can buy train tickets online as early as 20 days in advance starting in early January, eight days earlier than before. People can buy tickets in railway stations 18 days in advance, according to the new policy.

"In the past I usually bought train tickets at the railway station or its official agents, but now I always buy at home on my computer," said Wang Ying, a white-collar worker from East China's Anhui province, who works in Beijing.

"It saves me a lot of time. But still I found it very difficult to get a ticket before the Spring Festival, and all the tickets to my hometown seemed to be gone in a flash after they started selling online."

Despite the convenience of online buying, many migrant workers, who often lack basic computer skills, found it hard to get a ticket online.

Li Jun, a migrant worker who works in a restaurant in Beijing, said he finally got a ticket back home to Chengdu, Sichuan province, after visiting the Beijing Railway Station several times.

"I heard it's easier to get a ticket booking on the computer, but I don't know how to use the computer," he said. "Luckily, I live near the railway station, so I can keep coming here to try and finally I got one."

"It has always been very difficult to buy train tickets in recent years, not only for migrant workers, but also for all other groups such as white-collar workers," said Liu Xiao, a researcher in Beijing's Anbound Consultancy. "The root cause is the gap between supply and demand of train travel services," Liu said. "So we cannot blame the online booking for causing some migrant workers difficulty buying tickets."

Despite the great development of the railway network, China's railway capacity still cannot meet the surging demand during the peak traffic season, due to billions of trips being made within a very short period of time, an official of the Ministry of Railways told Xinhua.

"In the long run, balanced economic development among different regions can help reduce the need for immigration and can ultimately ease competition for buying train tickets during the Spring Festival period," said Liu.



ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Crowds of people wait for ticket-checking at Beijing Railway Station to board the train heading for Songyuan in Jilin province on Saturday, the first day of this year's Spring Festival travel rush.

THE WORLD'S MAJOR AIR FREIGHTERS

Y-20 / China

Max takeoff weight: 220,000 kg
Payload: 66,000 kg
Range with max payload: 4,400 km
Cruise speed: 850 km/h
Length: 47m
Wingspan: 50m
Height: 15m

With a payload of up to 55 metric tons, a Y-20 can fly 4,500 kilometers from Kashgar of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to Cairo, capital of Egypt.

With a payload of up to 55 metric tons, a Y-20 can fly 3,000 km from Shanghai to Guam in the western Pacific Ocean.



After two refueling operations, a Y-20 can fly 9,600 km from Kashgar to Luanda, capital of Angola in southern Africa.

After two refueling operations, a Y-20 can fly 9,000 km from Shanghai to Sydney in Australia.

Source: China Daily



Il-76 / Russia

Max takeoff weight: 195,000 kg
Payload: 50,000 kg
Range with max payload: 4,300 km
Cruise speed: 900 km/h
Length: 46.59m
Wingspan: 50.5m
Height: 14.76m

C-17 / US

Max takeoff weight: 265,350 kg
Payload: 77,519 kg
Range with max payload: 4,482 km
Cruise speed: 830 km/h
Length: 53m
Wingspan: 51.75m
Height: 16.8m

A400M / Europe

Max takeoff weight: 141,000 kg
Payload: 37,000 kg
Range with max payload: 3,298 km
Cruise speed: 780 km/h
Length: 45.1m
Wingspan: 42.4m
Height: 14.7m

GUILLELMO MUNRO, FENG XIUXIA AND ZHANG YE / CHINA DAILY

Y-20 gives air power a push

Successful maiden flight important in strengthening national defense

By ZHAO LEI

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The successful maiden flight of the Y-20, China's first domestically developed heavy air freighter, marks a step in the country's goal of building a strategic air power, according to military experts and observers.

"A genuine strategic air power must possess a strong power projection capability, which is highly reliant on large aircraft, namely a strategic air freighter and a strategic bomber," Wang Yanan, deputy editor-in-chief at Aerospace Knowledge magazine and a military analyst, said.

"The long-range power projection capability of the Chinese air force still lags behind. But the Y-20 means we have made strides toward building a strategic air power."

He said the breakthrough in the technology of large military aircraft will substantially accelerate the development of China's aviation industry and boost the drive to modernize the People's Liberation Army.

On Saturday, China conducted a test flight of the Y-20, a large, multi-function air freighter that can perform various long-distance transportation tasks.

"The successful maiden flight of the Y-20 is important in promoting China's economic and national defense buildup, as well as improving its emergency response and humanitarian aid abilities," the Ministry of National Defense said on its website on Saturday, adding that more experiments and test flights will be scheduled.

The official codename of the aircraft is *Kunpeng*, named after a legendary bird in Chinese mythology that can fly thousands of kilometers.

The jumbo air freighter is believed to have been developed by Xi'an Aircraft Industry, a subsidiary of Aviation Industry Corp of China, the major military aircraft manufacturer.

Large strategic air freighters in active service around the world include the Antonov An-225, the Ilyushin Il-76 and the Boeing C-17 Globemaster III.

The Y-20, with a crew of three, has a maximum payload



CHEN XIAO / XINHUA

The Y-20, China's first domestically made jumbo air freighter, held a successful test flight on Saturday.

of 66 metric tons and a maximum takeoff weight of more than 200 tons, China Youth Daily quoted military sources as saying. The high payload means the aircraft can fly the heaviest tank of the PLA — the 58-ton Type-99A2.

The length of the Y-20 is 47 meters and its wingspan is 50 meters, the report said.

An important addition

Sources said the aircraft began to be developed in the early 1990s. In 2006 it was listed in a national mid- and long-term technological development plan. In 2009, a senior executive at the Aviation Industry Corp of China told Chinese media the design of a "200-ton military aircraft" had been completed and production of prototypes had begun.

Photos of the Y-20 began to circulate on Chinese military websites on Dec 24, leading to speculation that the air freighter would soon conduct its first test flight.

Three days later, Yang Yujun, a spokesman for the Defense Ministry, confirmed at a news conference that China is "developing a large transport aircraft on our own to improve the capability of air transport".

Once in service, the Y-20 will significantly strengthen the PLA's long-range transport capability, which has been plagued for many years by the absence of a domestically developed strategic air freighter.

The PLA air force now has a transport fleet that mainly consists of the Y-7, the Y-8 and their variants.

The Y-7 is designed and



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made based on the Soviet-designed Antonov An-24 series, and the Y-8 is based on the Antonov An-12. Both have relatively light payloads and cannot carry heavy-duty armored vehicles and tanks.

There is also an unknown but presumably small number of Ilyushin Il-76 large air freighters in the air force, enabling the PLA to conduct strategic transport and disaster-relief missions.

In 2008, large transport aircraft from the PLA air force took part in rescue and relief missions after a devastating earthquake in Southwest China. Three years later, the air force also sent four Ilyushin Il-76s to strife-torn Libya to rescue stranded Chinese citizens.

The missions have proven the importance of long-range aircraft and also exposed the embarrassing fact that China still lacks enough strategic air freighters, military experts said.

"The Ilyushin Il-76 was developed by the former Soviet Union in the 1970s and has largely lagged behind in terms of technology and functions, but China has no other choice but to continue buying it," Peng Yue, a military observer, wrote in *Ta Kung Pao*, a Hong Kong-based newspaper. He noted that the unreliable supply of Ilyushin Il-76 from Russia has constrained China's production of a large, airborne early-warning and control system, which is installed on a modified Ilyushin IL-76 airframe.

Compared with the Russian airplane, the Y-20 is much more technically advanced in almost all areas, but due to the comparatively conservative aerodynamic design and the lack of a domestically developed engine, it still cannot rival the US' Boeing C-17 Globemaster III, experts said.

"The United States Air Force has more than 350 large air freighters with a minimum payload of 50 tons, while the Russian Air Force has 368 strategic air freighters. I think the biggest gap between the PLA and them in terms of conventional arsenals lies in the strategic transport capability," Peng said.

He said the Y-20 will not only improve the Chinese military's power projection and rapid deployment capabilities but also provide a reliable platform for domestically developed early warning and control, aerial refueling, and anti-submarine aircraft.

"The strategic importance of the Y-20 is even bigger than the J-20 stealth fighter jet and the aircraft carrier," he said.

Carrying a payload of up to 55 tons, the Y-20 is able of flying to destinations 4,500 km away from China, such as Guam in the western Pacific Ocean or Egypt, and if accompanied by a tanker aircraft it can even fly 9,600 km to Angola in southern Africa or Sydney in Australia, military analysts said.

"Our air force needs at least 100 strategic air freighters such as the Y-20 because transporting a brigade combat group alone needs 80 to 100 large air freighters," Wang at Aerospace Knowledge said. "If the PLA air force has 300 Y-20s, then its strategic transport capability will compete with that of the US air force."

Opportunities abound

In addition to its military implications, the Y-20 will bring many other benefits to China, said Liang Fang, a professor of strategy at the PLA National Defense University.

"Along with the expansion of our national interest, the heavy air freighters will ensure that we are able to safeguard our interests overseas," she said. "With them, we can transport our people or large equipment to farther destinations and retrieve them."

Du Wenlong, a senior researcher for the PLA Academy of Military Sciences, said: "The development of heavy transport aircraft, which is a cutting-edge equipment featuring advanced technology, will inject momentum to many related fields such as material science, engine research and manufacturing sectors, thus eventually upgrading the entire aviation industry of China."

Chinese military fans are also excited about the test flight of the Y-20.

"Good news has come again and again over the past two months. First we heard about the test flight of the J-31 stealth fighter jet, then the landing and takeoff of the J-15 on our aircraft carrier, and now we embrace the birth of the Y-20," said Qu Renming, a white-collar worker in Beijing. "The only concern for military fans is when can the Y-20 use our domestically developed engine and enter into service."

Wang added: "I think the test flights and other experiments with the Y-20 will last at least two years. And after the tests are finished, at least 10 aircraft will be manufactured each year."