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China Eastern Airlines has signed an agreement with The Boeing Company to modify two passenger MD-11 jetliners into full freighter configurations, with options for three additional MD-11 conversions.

The modification work for China Eastern will be performed under the direction of Boeing Airplane Services, the new business unit dedicated to becoming the world's No. 1 provider of commercial airplane engineering and modification services. Value of the contract was not disclosed. Boeing Airplane Services' DC-10/MD-10/MD-11 Program in Long Beach, Calif., will be directly responsible for the China Eastern MD-11 passenger-to-freighter conversions.

Founded in June 1988, China Eastern Airlines, or CEA, is one of the three key air transport enterprises in China. Headquartered in Shanghai, CEA has seven branches and operates a fleet of more than 60 passenger and cargo aircraft, with 20 international air routes and more than 150 air routes in China.

"The MD-11 modifications will significantly expand our freighter capacity and help us meet the increasingly growing cargo market," said Li Zhongming, president of China Eastern Airlines and chairman of newly founded China Cargo Airlines. The latter is the first dedicated cargo airline in China and a joint venture of China Eastern and China Ocean Shipping Company.

The China Eastern-Boeing agreement calls for the removal of the passenger furnishings, installation of a 140-inch-wide side cargo door, and installation of a main deck cargo-handling system capable of loading 26 standard pallets. The jetliners will be certified for 630,500 pounds maximum takeoff gross weight.

"We are delighted to provide the world's finest and most competitive MD-11 conversions for China Eastern," said Joe Gullion, president - Boeing Airplane Services. "Our goal is to help airline operators, such as China Eastern, reduce cost and enhance reliability and maintainability of their aircraft. And we intend to expand into new product and service offerings that respond to their requirements and preferences."

By bringing together all of the Boeing modification and related engineering organizations into Boeing Airplane Services, Gullion said the new business offers focused and integrated services that enhance commercial airplane performance and productivity. In addition to converting MD-11s, Boeing is well known for its DC-10/MD-10 and 747 passenger-to-freighter conversions. The business performs major maintenance requirements during the modification process, providing convenience and efficiency for its customers.

Boeing Airplane Services also provides interior reconfiguration programs and extensive engineering services, including avionics upgrades, performance improvements and other upgrades on both Boeing and Douglas-built airplanes. The business is based in Bellevue, Wash., with major operations in Long Beach and Wichita, Kansas.

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