

Regional concern

Fukushima wastewater disposal plan worries Pacific nations

WORLD, PAGE 11



Livestreamers head overseas for sales, profits

CHINA, PAGE 6

Major players

National table tennis trials live up to blockbuster billing **SPORTS, PAGE 20**



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Selection of foreign space crew to start

Qualified candidates scheduled to receive systematic, extensive training in China

By ZHAO LEI
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China will start the selection and training process soon for foreign astronauts to participate in joint flights to the country's Tiangong space station, according to a high-ranking space official.

Chen Shangang, deputy chief planner of China's manned space programs, told China Central Television on Saturday that multiple countries have told China that they hope to send their astronauts to the Tiangong station.

"We will soon begin to select candidates from those nations for joint flights to our space station, and they will be able to work with our astronauts to carry out scientific tasks in space," Chen said.

Once the candidates pass the initial selection process, they will come to China to receive systematic and extensive training to learn how to operate Chinese spacecraft and live and work inside the Tiangong station, according to Chen.

"We also hope that the foreign candidates can gain some knowledge about Chinese culture because they will be onboard a Chinese space station. Moreover, we hope that cultural exchanges between foreign and Chinese astronauts will help with their flight," he said.

Pang Zhinao, an expert on space exploration technology and a renowned writer on spaceflight, said on Sunday that one of the most important criteria for the foreign candidates is their Chinese-language skill.

"The work language on the International Space Station is English. Therefore, the language to be spoken inside a Chinese station is naturally Chinese," Pang said, echoing Chen's advice that those foreign astronauts should know about Chinese culture.

Chen is not the first Chinese space official who has spoken about sending foreigners to the Tiangong station.

[See Space, page 3](#)

Space: Nation open to intl cooperation

[From page 1](#)

Before Chen, Yang Liwei, the first Chinese in space and now a deputy chief planner of the country's manned spaceflights, and Hao Chun, head of the China Manned Space Agency, have said that China is open to international cooperation on its space station, including flights jointly crewed with other nations.

Nie Haisheng, a senior astronaut

and commander of the Shenzhou XII mission crew, said in 2021 that he and his fellow Chinese astronauts would welcome having foreign partners on the Tiangong station.

"We welcome our foreign counterparts, whom we will treat as friends, to join us at this 'space home.' We are determined to make our station a shared platform to advance science and technology to benefit all people around the world," he said.

In August 2017, Samantha Cristoforetti of Italy and Matthias Maurer of Germany, both from the European Space Agency, participated in a sea survival exercise, which was organized by the Astronaut Center of China, in waters off the coastal city of Yantai, Shandong province.

They were the first foreign astronauts to take part in spaceflight training in China.

Satellite to deliver stellar internet

By ZHAO LEI
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People in China and neighboring regions will soon have faster, more convenient access to the internet when traveling by air and sea, and even in the middle of the desert, thanks to a newly launched satellite.

The ChinaSat 26, lifted into space atop a Long March 3B carrier rocket on Thursday evening from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province, is the most advanced civilian communications satellite in China and its overall capability is on par with the best in the world, according to China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

Developed by the China Academy of Space Technology in Beijing, a CASC subsidiary, the satellite circles the Earth in a geostationary orbit and has a working life span of 15 years.

After in-orbit tests carried out by engineers at the academy scheduled to last several months are completed, control of the satellite will be handed over to China Satellite Communications, another subsidiary of CASC, to start formal operation.

Wei Qiang, ChinaSat 26's project manager, said it will become a pillar of China's high-throughput communications satellite network and will be used to connect terminal devices mounted on cars, ships and aircraft to high-speed broadband internet.

Once a plane or a ship is linked to the web via the satellite, its terminal will act as an onboard Wi-Fi device enabling passengers to use internet services.

Carrying as many as 50 transponders — the most of any Chinese civilian satellite — the craft has the largest transmission capacity of Chinese communications satellites of 100 gigabits per second.

"It is able to serve as many as 1 million users at the same time. It will be useful in a wide range of businesses such as air and maritime transport, remote education and medical service, emergency communications as well as the protection of natural reserves," Wei said.

Prior to ChinaSat 26, China had deployed several high-throughput communications satellites including ChinaSat 16 and APSTAR 6D.

China Satellite Communications operates 17 communication satellites covering China, southern and southeastern Asia, the Middle East, and some parts of Europe and Africa.

Thursday's launch was the 463rd mission of a rocket from the Long March family and China's sixth launch in 2023, as well as the first flight of the Long March 3B model.

In 2023, there are plans for 60 launch missions, including manned and robotic flights to the Tiangong space station and the maiden flight of the Long March 8C.