



INTERNATIONAL ASTRONAUTICAL FEDERATION

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Chinese officials unveil space station plans

China expects to complete its first orbiting space station within a decade, and be able to send crews of up to six people there for short-term missions.

Chinese officials revealed details of the country's space plans for low Earth orbit during the 64th International Astronautical Congress (IAC) taking place in Beijing, China, this week.

Mr Xu Dazhe, general manager of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, said the station - covering an area of 60 square metres - would be capable of supporting three astronauts on long-term flights.

Before that China will launch the Tiangong-2 space laboratory in around two years to test renewable life support and in-orbit refuelling systems, technologies that will be essential for the safe operation of the planned space station.

Mr Xu revealed that one cargo 'shuttle' and several crewed spacecraft will be launched to dock with Tiangong-2 at different times.

According to the China Manned Space Engineering Office, the space station will consist of three capsules and a cargo 'shuttle' to transport supplies.

The station's core module will be 18.1 m in length and will weigh 20 to 22 metric tons. It will be attached to two self-contained laboratories.

Mr Wang Zhaoyao, director of the China Manned Space Agency, said that once operational astronauts will be scheduled for long-term missions in orbit, conducting a wide range of technical tests as well as medical, science and educational experiments.

Liu Yang, China's first female astronaut - who appeared with her colleague Wang Yaping, the second Chinese female astronaut who flew into space on Shenzhou 10 in June 2013 - repeated the declaration that her nation would also be willing to accept foreign astronauts for future

missions.

The country successfully carried out its first manual space docking, another essential step in building a space station, in June last year when three Chinese astronauts piloted Shenzhou 9 to link up with Tiangong-1.

China became the third country to independently launch a human into space in 2003 and has been rapidly expanding its space programme ever since.

Berndt Feuerbacher, former president of the International Astronautical Federation (IAF), said that China's space programme was developing quickly and actively looking for cooperation opportunities.

The annual IAC space congress has a record number of around 3,500 space scientists and business people attending this year, representing some 74 countries from across the world.

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