

Eleventh Chinese Space Day 2026

At the end of April 2026, China celebrated its 11th Space Day, highlighting a number of significant new advances in China's aerospace sector. In addition, new findings from the lunar samples of the Chang'e-5 mission, the schedule for the planetary exploration mission Tianwen-3 and international cooperation within the framework of the solar observation mission Xihe-2. A Chinese expert explained that the country's space industry is developing at an impressive pace and that China is sharing its achievements through open and equal cooperation to benefit as many countries as possible worldwide.



New scientific findings

One of the most significant announcements made during the opening ceremony of the 11th Chinese Space Day was the discovery of two previously unknown lunar minerals by Chinese scientists. These were identified from the total of 1,731 grams of lunar samples returned to Earth by the Chang'e-5 mission, representing a further breakthrough in deep space exploration. The two newly discovered minerals have been officially recognized and classified by the International Mineralogical Association; they bear the names Magnesiochangesite-(Y) and Changesite-(Ce).

These constitute the second and third lunar minerals discovered by Chinese researchers, following the identification of the first such mineral—Changesite-(Y)—back in 2022. Globally, these represent the seventh and eighth newly discovered lunar mineral species found within returned lunar samples.

Planetary exploration plans

Furthermore, the Chinese space agency (China National Space Administration, CNSA) announced at the event that the planetary exploration mission Tianwen-3 is expected to launch around the year 2028. The goal is to return samples from Mars around the year 2031. According to the news agency Xinhua, five international cooperative projects—as well as projects from Hong Kong and Macau—have been selected to participate in this mission.

The CNSA also presented the specific cooperative projects for the Tianwen-3 mission. The orbiter will carry three international payloads on board: a Mars-PEX spectrometer, led by the Space Research Working Group of the Committee on Space Research, which is tasked with searching for traces of life on Mars and analyzing the mineralogical composition of the Martian surface; and a molecular ion analyzer, developed under the leadership of the Macau University of Science and Technology, for the study of the escape of the Martian atmosphere; as well as a laser heterodyne spectrometer led by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which will analyze the distribution of water isotopes in the Martian atmosphere as well as Martian winds.

As part of the 11th Space Day, China also unveiled—for the first time—a *standardization system for the commercial space sector*. The aim is to guide the development of the space industry through uniform standards and to foster the high-quality development of commercial space activities.

Wang Yanan, Editor-in-Chief of the Beijing-based journal **Aerospace Knowledge**, told the **Global Times** that China's space industry is developing at an unprecedented pace. In several key areas, it has already reached the highest international standards and achieved significant successes in space exploration.

By exploring the unknown through its space programs, China aims to unlock new opportunities for the country's long-term development. Long-term scientific initiatives—such as lunar exploration, the planned return of samples from Mars, and continuous progress in the analysis of lunar soil—clearly demonstrate China's determination to sustainably expand its space industry, Wang noted.

International cooperation

China's progress in space exploration is not limited to its own development, but is actively shared through international cooperation.

For example, during World Space Day, the CNSA announced opportunities for international collaboration on the Xihe-2 solar observation mission and invited global partners to jointly advance research about the sun and deepen humanity's understanding of our solar system.

On the same day, two Pakistani astronauts arrived in China and were welcomed at the China Astronaut Research and Training Center in Beijing. Previously, the China Manned Space Agency had announced that Muhammad Zeeshan Ali and Khurram Daud had been selected as the first foreign astronauts to participate in China's spaceflight training program. Upon completion of their training and evaluation, one of them will participate in a spaceflight mission as a payload specialist, thereby becoming the first foreign astronaut aboard the Chinese space station, Tiangong.

At a regular press conference, the spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Guo Jiakun, was asked whether China would foster even more open and inclusive international cooperation in space in the future—particularly against the backdrop that competition in space is increasingly shifting from technological aspects toward regulatory frameworks and alliances. Guo emphasized that space must not be a venue for competition between great powers.

China will furthermore continue to cooperate with other countries to support an open cooperation in space and advance humanity's shared efforts to explore space.

He emphasized that China has always pursued the principles of equality, mutual benefit, peaceful use, and inclusive development in international space cooperation.

China has already signed space cooperation agreements with numerous African countries.

Furthermore, ten works of art created by African youth are aboard the Tiangong space station.

The joint Earth observation satellite program between China and Brazil supports the protection of South American rainforests, and Pakistani astronauts are preparing to fly alongside their Chinese colleagues to fly to a space station, according to Guo.

A particularly noteworthy feature of China's openness in space cooperation is that comprehensive collaboration facilitates access to space technologies for countries from the Global South. This provides them with new opportunities to participate in scientific

research in space. This stands in stark contrast to previous cooperation models of some developed countries, which mostly limited their partnerships to technologically leading and resource-rich states.

"Under the guiding principle of equal cooperation, increasingly more countries will benefit from China's space program in the future—an approach that is likely to gain growing recognition worldwide," Guo Jiakun concluded.

Reference:

[1] China Rundschau (Gesellschaft, page 9) Editor Jessi B, KW 18, 2026.

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