

China announces first astronaut candidates from Hong Kong, Macau

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China on Tuesday announced the first astronaut candidates from its special administrative regions of Macau and Hong Kong, with the latter calling it a "glorious page" in the city's history.

Beijing has invested billions of dollars in its military-run space program as it pursues ambitious plans for a manned lunar landing by 2030.

The China Manned Space Agency said Tuesday that a payload specialist from Hong Kong and another from Macau were among 10 candidates for the country's fourth batch of astronauts.

Hong Kong leader John Lee called it "a glorious page in Hong Kong's history".

"This is... the first time that a Hong Kong citizen was selected as a payload specialist in China's manned space program, with a chance to become an astronaut to go to space in person, to participate in research and to contribute the country's space program," Lee said.

Sun Dong, Hong Kong's tech and innovation secretary, said the winning candidate was selected out of a pool of 120 applicants through a multi-round process that has been going on since 2022.

"We accepted a rather wide range of professional backgrounds including natural sciences, engineering, biology and medical science, because the space is a brand new area for scientific exploration," he told reporters, declining to name the Hong Konger selected.

Macau's government also issued a statement Tuesday, calling the selection of one of its own "an honor" that sent "a strong inspirational message to the young people of Macau".

The China Manned Space Agency said the decision to select astronauts from the two territories "has garnered strong support and enthusiastic participation from local communities".

Plans for China's "space dream" have been put into overdrive under

Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Beijing has heavily invested in its space program over the past decade, trying to catch up with the United States and Russia after years of belatedly matching their milestones.

The country notched a win this month after its probe carrying samples from the far side of the moon started its journey back to Earth.

Other achievements included building a space station called Tiangong, or "heavenly palace", as well as landing robotic rovers on Mars and the moon.

China aims to send a crewed mission to the moon by 2030 and plans to build a base on the lunar surface.

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