



Night trading

Cities promote business, consumption in evening to boost economies **BIZ LIFE, PAGE 9**



Pandas foster ties

Increasing exchanges expected between Hong Kong, Sichuan

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CHINA DAILY

香港版
HONG KONG

中國日報

MONDAY, October 3, 2022

www.chinadailyhk.com HK \$10

Search starts for new group of astronauts

People from Hong Kong, Macao able to take part for first time, says space agency

By ZHAO LEI in Beijing and LI BINGCUN in Hong Kong

China has recently started its search for the country's fourth generation of astronauts, and, for the first time, this will include people from Hong Kong and Macao, the China Manned Space Agency said.

The agency said in a news release on Sunday afternoon that experts will select 12 to 14 candidates for the new generation. Among them, there will be seven to eight spacecraft pilots, three to four spacecraft engineers and two payload specialists.

The pilots will be chosen from among aviators currently serving in the People's Liberation Army. The engineers will be selected from among researchers and technicians in aerospace or related industries, and the payload specialists will be chosen from among scientists working in the space science and technology field.

The recruitment and selection processes are scheduled to be completed within 18 months, the agency said, noting that the payload specialists' posts are open to people from the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions.

Pang Zhihao, a renowned observer of manned spaceflights, said that many researchers in Hong Kong and Macao focus on space science. An opportunity to participate in a

spaceflight will tremendously foster their research and expand their understanding, he added.

"The presence of researchers from Hong Kong and Macao in space will definitely encourage more youngsters there to take part in space exploration and scientific studies," Pang said.

As construction of China's space station gradually progresses, the country needs fresh talent to carry out this ambitious endeavor.

Currently, the Astronaut Center of China in Beijing is training the third group of Chinese astronauts.

The 18 new astronauts — 17 men and one woman — are in three groups: seven spacecraft pilots, seven spacecraft engineers and four payload specialists. They are undergoing systematic training before being certified for space missions.

About 2,500 applicants took part in the selection for the third generation team from May 2018 to September 2020, which involved three rounds of tests.

Before the third group, China had 21 astronauts from its first two generations. Among them, 14 took part in nine flight missions, including Shenzhou XIV, which is the latest. Several in the first generation who had not taken part in any spaceflights during their service have already retired.

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HK thrilled by chance to join national astronaut selection

By LI BINGCUN and WILLIAM XU

Hong Kong communities welcomed the nation's unprecedented move to include the special administrative region's professionals in the selection of payload specialists among the fourth batch of astronauts. The pick of talents will start from Thursday.

In a government statement on Sunday, Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu said the move reflected the nation's confidence in Hong Kong's scientific research ability, as well as its care for Hong Kong youngsters' development.

It enables more Hong Kong professionals to contribute to the country's scientific development, and the SAR government will make every effort to assist and cooperate with the selection process, Lee said.

He also encouraged all Hong Kong students and local communities to take this opportunity to better understand the nation's fruitful achievements on manned space programs and to enhance their national awareness and identity.

According to the official website of the China Manned Space Agency, payload specialists are responsible for performing scientific research and experiments on space stations or space shuttles.

Briefing media outlets on Sunday night, Deputy Financial Secretary Michael Wong Wai-lun, Secretary for Innovation, Technology and

Industry Sun Dong and other government officials unveiled the details of the selection process.

The initial selection of Hong Kong payload specialists will run from Oct 6 to 27. The candidates will be selected mainly from 11 local universities, five government research centers and the Hong Kong Productivity Council, science institutions and enterprises at the Cyberport and Science Park, government departments and the Hospital Authority.

The government said it would consider experts from other organizations and enterprises who apply to the scheme on a case-by-case basis. After initial selection by the HKSAR government, subsequent screening will be undertaken by the relevant mainland authorities.

The posts are only available to Hong Kong permanent residents with Chinese nationality. The specialists who are finally selected will receive training offered by the country and can receive allowances during the process.

All candidates must be aged between 30 and 45 years old, with a doctorate in a relevant field and at least 3 years of professional experience.

Sun, who has undertaken the initial selection work, said aerospace development is no longer just a dream for Hong Kong people but an important industry for Hong Kong's reindustrialization.

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HK: Govt to boost public education

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In recent years, Hong Kong's space industry has seen rapid development, whether in terms of the establishment of local enterprises and groups, the launching of commercial satellites, the participation of national missions, government support in research work, or university education in this field, Sun said.

The city established its first commercial space enterprise Hong Kong Aerospace Technology Group in 2019 and launched its first two commercial satellites in 2021.

Sun said he hopes the space industry development will fuel the city's overall scientific and economic development, and propel Hong Kong to be a leading science hub in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and even around the globe.

The officials said the government will further boost local residents' understanding of the nation's aerospace development and the city's participation in national space missions through various TV programs, exhibitions and seminars.

Hong Kong legislator Wong Kwok noted that as the International Space Station is expected to be decommissioned in several years, various countries are hoping to join China's space station program. Against such a background, he said, allowing Hong Kong specialists to join the nation's astronauts is a great honor for the city and will significantly boost the city's inno-tech development.

Wong Yuk-shan, chairman of the Research Grants Council, praised Hong Kong's science research ability, noting some of its researchers have taken the lead on global issues. He called on the city's scientists to seize the chance to contribute to the nation with their strengths.

In an earlier interview with Wen Wei Po, the chief designer of China's manned space project astronaut system Huang Weifeng said China's astronaut training has completed setting its standards, whether in terms of professional astronauts, engineers or payload specialists, which means the technical preparation for selecting astronauts in Hong Kong is finished. "We will certainly welcome it if Hong Kong compatriots want to become national astronauts."

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Astronauts Chen Dong (center), Liu Yang (left) and Cai Xuzhe (right) send their National Day greetings from space. CHINA MANNED SPACE ENGINEERING OFFICE