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## Preparations underway for crewed spaceflight

By ZHAO LEI  
[zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn)

China's next crewed spaceflight will take place soon as the Shenzhou XII spacecraft and the carrier rocket that will lift it have arrived at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China.

The China Manned Space Agency said in a brief statement on Thursday that the spacecraft and the Long March 2F rocket were transported to the launch complex in the Gobi Desert on separate dates and are being assembled and tested.

The astronauts for the Shenzhou XII mission are participating in intensive training, it said.

All facilities at the Jiuquan center are in good condition, and all systems to be involved in the mission are undergoing orderly preparations, it added.

Crew members of the Shenzhou XII mission will be the first group tasked with building the nation's first space station — Tiangong, or Heavenly Palace.

The astronauts' spacecraft will dock with Tiangong's core capsule, which is scheduled to be lifted by a Long March 5B heavy-lift rocket from the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province in the coming weeks. They will then enter the capsule and live and work inside it for several months.

The core capsule, Tianhe, or Harmony of Heavens, will be 16.6 meters long and have a diameter of 4.2 meters. It will have three parts — a life-support and control section, a resources section, and a connecting section.

China's most sophisticated space endeavor and its largest space-based asset, the multi-module Tiangong will have three main components — a core capsule attached to two space laboratories — with a combined weight of more than 90 metric tons.

It is expected to become fully operational around the end of next year and is set to operate for about 15 years, program planners have said.

In the first stage of the station's construction, astronauts on the Shenzhou XII and XIII missions and two cargo ships will be launched within a few months to prepare the module for docking with other parts of the station.

On October 15, 2003, China carried out its first manned space mission, sending Yang Liwei, a former fighter jet pilot, on a 21-hour journey around Earth in the Shenzhou V spacecraft.

China has since conducted six manned spaceflights, which have totaled 68 days and orbited Earth 1,089 times. Eleven Chinese astronauts have traveled more than 46 million kilometers in space and conducted more than 100 experiments.