Shenzhou-24: Pakistan's first astronaut set for China's Tiangong

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News

Muhammad Zeeshan Ali of Pakistan was selected as payload specialist on China's Shenzhou-24 crewed mission, scheduled to lift off at 8:18 am Beijing time (5:48 am IST) on 25 Nov 2026 from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in the Gobi Desert on a Long March-2F rocket. He is set to become the first foreign astronaut to visit China's Tiangong space station and the first Pakistani in orbit. Flying with commander Tang Hongbo and astronaut Wu Yi, he is to spend about a week in space and return on Shenzhou-23. He is one of two Pakistanis trained in China under a February 2025 agreement between Pakistan's SUPARCO and the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA).

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Commander / crew member	Tang Hongbo / Wu Yi (China)
Pakistani crew	Muhammad Zeeshan Ali (payload specialist)
Stay	About one week; return on Shenzhou-23
Pakistan's space agency	SUPARCO
Experiments	About 90 (CMSA)
Agreement	SUPARCO–CMSA, February 2025: two trained, one to fly

Background

- Tiangong is China's own space station; its core module Tianhe was launched in 2021. China is not a partner of the International Space Station (ISS).
- India: Rakesh Sharma was the first Indian in space (1984, Soviet Soyuz T-11). Shubhanshu Shukla became the first Indian on the ISS (Axiom-4, 2025). ISRO's Gaganyaan is India's own human spaceflight programme.

Tamil Nadu link: ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan hails from Kanyakumari district. Gaganyaan's engines are tested at the ISRO Propulsion Complex, Mahendragiri (Tirunelveli), and India's second spaceport is coming up at Kulasekarapattinam (Thoothukudi) for small rockets (SSLV).

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

Muhammad Zeeshan Ali of Pakistan was selected as payload specialist on China's Shenzhou-24 crewed mission, scheduled to lift off at 8:18 am Beijing time (5:48 am IST) on 25 Nov 2026 from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in the Gobi Desert on a Long March-2F rocket.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Commander / crew member: Tang Hongbo / Wu Yi (China); Pakistani crew: Muhammad Zeeshan Ali (payload specialist); Stay: About one week; return on Shenzhou-23; Pakistan's space agency: SUPARCO.

What is the background to this news?

Tiangong is China's own space station; its core module Tianhe was launched in 2021. China is not a partner of the International Space Station (ISS).

Practice questions (with answers)

1. Who is the Pakistani payload specialist on China's Shenzhou-24 mission?

A) Muhammad Zeeshan Ali

B) Arshad Nadeem

C) Khurram Daud

D) Ahsan Iqbal

Answer: A – Explanation: Of the two trained in China (Zeeshan Ali and Khurram Daud), Zeeshan Ali was chosen; he is the first foreigner bound for Tiangong.

2. From which launch centre does Shenzhou-24 lift off?

A) Wenchang

B) Jiuquan (Gobi Desert)

C) Xichang

D) Taiyuan

Answer: B – Explanation: So far, all Chinese crewed flights have lifted off from Jiuquan; the rocket is the Long March-2F.

3. What is the name of China's own space station?

A) Salyut

B) Skylab

C) Tiangong

D) Mir

Answer: C – Explanation: Tiangong's core module Tianhe was launched in 2021; Mir and Salyut were Soviet, Skylab was American.

4. Who became the first Indian to visit the International Space Station (ISS)?

A) Kalpana Chawla

B) Rakesh Sharma

C) Ravish Malhotra

D) Shubhanshu Shukla

Answer: D – Explanation: Shubhanshu Shukla went to the ISS on Axiom-4 (2025); Rakesh Sharma flew to a Soviet station on Soyuz T-11 in 1984.

5. Where is India's second spaceport, for small rockets (SSLV), coming up?

A) Mahendragiri, Tirunelveli

B) Chandipur, Odisha

C) Thumba, Thiruvananthapuram

D) Kulasekarapattinam, Thoothukudi

Answer: D – Explanation: Kulasekarapattinam allows direct southward launches; Mahendragiri hosts the ISRO Propulsion Complex.