



People watch a live stream of Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft's landing on the moon, in Gujarat Science City in Ahmedabad, India, on Aug. 23, 2023. Reuters

## EXPANSION

# India's space industry gears up for human spaceflight tests

ISRO plans 7 space missions by March 2026, including Gaganyaan mission test

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**After sending its first astronaut to the International Space Station, autonomously docking two satellites, and launching the heaviest payload this year, India's space industry is preparing for the first uncrewed test of its human spaceflight program in 2026.**

In 2025, India's space program spearheaded by the Indian Space Research Organisation marked several milestones, starting in January, when it became the fourth country to perform space docking — connecting two

spacecraft in orbit, which is a capability crucial for future space stations and deep-space missions.

In June, Shubhanshu Shukla, an Indian Air Force pilot, flew to the ISS as part of the Axiom 4 mission. He became the second Indian national in space, after Rakesh Sharma in 1984.

A month later, ISRO, in collaboration with NASA, launched a joint observation satellite to provide high-resolution radar imagery of the Earth, and in December capped the year by deploying the BlueBird Block 2, the heaviest payload ever launched from Indian soil.

It "marked a decisive year for India's space sector as policy reforms translated into tangible execution across launch, satellite

## HIGHLIGHT

**India currently accounts for about 2 percent of the \$450 billion global space economy, with its share expected to rise to nearly 8 percent by 2033, driven largely by private companies.**

manufacturing, Earth observation, space data, and satellite communications," said Lt. Gen. AK Bhatt (retd.), director general of the Indian Space Association.

The year also saw new contracts, production lines, launch vehicles moving closer to operational readiness, and growth in India's \$9 billion space economy driven largely by the

private industry and public-private partnerships, which Bhatt expected to expand in the coming year.

"The Indian space sector is poised for a transformative 2026, with ISRO's rigorous seven-mission schedule by March," he told *Arab News*.

ISRO last month announced plans to complete seven space missions by March 2026, including the first uncrewed test flight of India's Gaganyaan human spaceflight program.

Another mission will be EOS-N1, where ISRO and India's Defence Research and Development Organisation will launch an Earth observation satellite for strategic and surveillance applications.