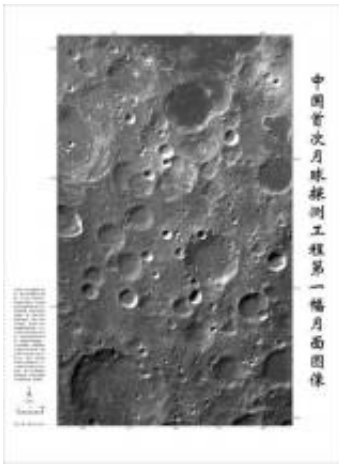


# China could launch lunar probe on Friday: state media

September 28 2010

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The first photo of the moon taken by China's Chang'e-1 orbiter, was released as evidence of the nation's rise as a space and technological power on 26 November 2007 in Beijing. China is making final preparations to launch its second lunar probe, possibly as soon as Friday, when the nation marks 61 years of communist rule, state media reported Tuesday.

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A [launch](#) rocket carrying the Chang'e-2, which will go into orbit within 15 kilometres (nine miles) of the moon, has been set up in the southwestern province of Sichuan, the official China Daily reported.

Chief programme engineers have arrived at the satellite launch centre in the city of Xichang to carry out final tests, and staff at the centre have said that barring complications, the launch could come on October 1, it said.

Friday is China's national day, in celebration of Mao Zedong's proclamation of the founding of the People's Republic in 1949.

Meteorologists have forecast clear skies in the Xichang area from Thursday, the report said.

Space programme officials had said previously that the mission would be launched in October, but no precise date had been given.

The [lunar probe](#) will conduct various tests in preparation for the expected launch in 2013 of the Chang'e-3, which aims to be China's first unmanned landing on the moon, state media have reported.

The Chang'e programme, named after a mythical Chinese goddess who flew to the moon, is seen as an effort to put China's space exploration programme on a par with those of the United States and Russia.

China launched Chang'e-1, which orbited the [moon](#) and took high-resolution pictures of the [lunar surface](#), in October 2007.

The country hopes to bring a [moon rock](#) sample back to earth in 2017, with a manned mission foreseen in around 2020, according to state media.

China became the world's third nation to put a man in space independently -- after the United States and Russia -- when Yang Liwei piloted the one-man Shenzhou-5 [space mission](#) in 2003.

The Americans have achieved the only manned lunar missions, making six trips from 1969 to 1972.

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