# China satellite aborts mission after 'malfunction'

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This file photo shows a Chinese 'Long March' being launched into space. An new "experimental" satellite failed to reach its designated orbit after its rocket malfunctioned, according to state media.

An "experimental" satellite launched by China failed to reach its designated orbit after its rocket malfunctioned, according to state media.

Orbiter SJ-11-04, which was propelled by a Long March II-C rocket, was launched on Thursday but was unable to complete its mission "due to a malfunction of the rocket", the official Xinhua news agency said.

The report said the satellite was an "experimental orbiter" but did not disclose further details.

Observers on the web forum NASASpaceFlight.com have speculated

that China was due to use the satellite as part of an operational early warning defence system, but AFP was unable to confirm the information from official sources.

According to the forum, this is the first time the Long March II-C rocket has failed after 35 successful launches, and only the second time China has had to abort a satellite mission since February 1996.

Xinhua said authorities were investigating the specific cause of the rocket's failure.

China's space programme -- launched in the early 1990s thanks to the acquisition of Russian technology -- has become a symbol of its growing global stature.

In 2003, China became the world's third nation to put a man in space independently, after the United States and Russia.

In October last year, it launched its second lunar probe, Chang'e-2 -- the next step in a bold programme to become the second country to put a man on the moon. Beijing also plans to build its own space station.