China to collect samples from Mars by 2030: Xinhua

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This NASA image obtained in 2002 shows dust storms observed by the Mars Global Surveyor Mars Orbiter Camera. China is planning to collect samples from the surface of Mars by 2030, according to the chief scientist of the country's lunar orbiter project, state media reported.

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state media reported Wednesday.

Ouyang Ziyuan said the mission would have three stages—remote sensing, soft-landing and exploration, and return after automatic sampling, Xinhua news agency quoted him as saying in a lecture organised by the Chinese Society of Astronautics.

Ouyang also briefed attendees on the tests and work to be carried out by China's lunar probe, the Chang'e-3, which is expected to touch down on the moon in the second half of 2013.

He said the probe could help build a telecommunications network that would cover a future Mars probe and said samples taken from the moon would be returned to earth, Xinhua reported.

The landing planned for next year would be China's first on the lunar surface and mark a new milestone in its space development.

Beijing sees its multi-billion-dollar space programme as a symbol of its rising global stature, growing technical expertise, and the Communist Party's success in turning around the fortunes of the once poverty-stricken nation.

The Asian superpower has been ramping up its manned activities as the United States, long the leader in the field, has scaled back some of its programmes, such as retiring its iconic space shuttle fleet.