

China 'plans manned space launch' in 2013

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A Chinese rocket takes off with the Venezuelan earth observation satellite Miranda from the Gobi desert in Jiuquan, northwest China's Gansu province in September. China is aiming to launch its next manned space mission as early as June 2013, state media reported Saturday, as the country steps up its ambitious exploration programme.

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The [Shenzhou-10](#), with three crew members, is aiming for a primary [launch window](#) in June, Niu Hongguang, deputy commander-in-chief of the manned space programme, told China National Radio in an interview Friday.

Niu, speaking on the sidelines of China's 18th Communist Party Congress that kicked off Thursday in Beijing, said officials had identified a back-up launch window for July or August.

He said one of the three astronauts would likely be a woman.

China sent its first female astronaut, Liu Yang, into space earlier this year on the Shenzhou-9 in the country's first manual space docking mission.

The docking procedure was a major milestone in the country's ambitious space programme that has a goal of building a space station by the end of the decade.

In its last white paper on space, China said it was working towards landing a man on the moon, but did not specify a time-frame.

So far only the United States has achieved that feat, most recently in 1972.

Beijing has said it will also attempt to land an exploratory craft on the moon for the first time in the second half of 2013 and transmit back a survey of the [lunar surface](#).

China sees its 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 country sent its first man into space in 2003. It completed a [space walk](#) in 2008 and an unmanned docking between a module and rocket last year.

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