China's first lunar rover to land on moon Saturday

December 13 2013

Photo taken on November 5, 2013 shows a model of "Jade Rabbit" at the China International Industry Fair 2013 in Shanghai

A space module carrying China's first lunar rover is scheduled to land on the moon Saturday, authorities said Friday, describing the manouevre as the mission's greatest challenge.

The spacecraft is scheduled to make touchdown 12 days after the

Chang'e-3 mission blasted off on a Long March-3B carrier rocket from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in the country's southwest.

"On the evening of December 14, Chang'e-3 will carry out a soft landing on the lunar surface," said a post on the mission's official blog on Sina Weibo, a Chinese version of Twitter.

The task was described as the mission's "most difficult" in the post, which was written by the Chinese Academy of Sciences on behalf of the country's space authorities.

The Chang'e-3 mission is named after the goddess of the moon in Chinese mythology and the rover vehicle is called Yutu, or Jade Rabbit, after her pet.

The landing is expected to mark the latest step in an ambitious space programme which is seen as a symbol of China's rising global stature and technological advancement.

China is aiming to become the third country to carry out a rover mission, following the United States and former Soviet Union decades ago.

The Chang'e-3 rocket carrying the Jade Rabbit rover blasts off from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in China's southwest province of Sichuan on December 2, 2013