

## China researchers plan Mars mission 'around 2020'

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A rocket is launched from Xichang space base in Xichang, southwestern China's Sichuan province, on October 24, 2014

Chinese scientists are planning to launch a Mars rover "around 2020", state media reported on Tuesday, as the country pours billions into its space programme and works to catch up with the US and Europe.

Although the government has not officially announced plans for a Mars

mission, officials from the China National Space Administration are currently lobbying to have it put on the agenda and have begun "preliminary research", the state-run China Daily reported.

"We plan to conduct the Mars mission around 2020, which will include the probe's orbiting, landing and roaming," Peng Tao, a space expert with the China Academy of Space Technology, was quoted by China Daily as saying.

"By contrast, other nations will need multiple missions to achieve those three steps."

The statements came less than a week after prototypes for the Mars rover were debuted at the China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition.

China's recent space efforts have been focused on exploring the moon. The nation's first lunar rover—the Yutu, or Jade Rabbit—was launched late last year, but it has since been beset by mechanical troubles.

The planned Mars rover will be bigger than the Yutu in order to deal with the harsher terrain, China Daily quoted space officials as saying.

Scientists are now focused on sending a manned mission to the moon and returning samples safely back to Earth.



The moon shines over the Turret of Palace Museum at the Forbidden City, in Beijing, on December 13, 2013

The US has landed two rovers on Mars and India successfully put a satellite into orbit around the red planet in September. The former Soviet Union and the European Space Agency have also sent missions to Mars.

China's first attempt to send a satellite into Mars orbit foundered in 2011 when the Russian rocket carrying the payload failed to make it out of the Earth's orbit.

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