

China develops new rocket for manned moon mission: media

December 8 2014

China is developing a huge rocket that will be used for its first manned mission to the moon, state media said Monday, underscoring Beijing's increasingly ambitious space programme.

The first launch of the Long March-9 will take place around 2028, said the China Daily, which also cited experts saying the rocket's development is at the research stage.

It will carry a load of 130 tonnes, the newspaper added, equal to what NASA is aiming for with its Space Launch System (SLS), which aims to blast off for the first time in 2018 with an initial test payload of 70 tonnes.

The US space agency has touted its deep-space rocket as having "unprecedented lift capability".

Li Tongyu, head of aerospace products at the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, told the newspaper: "Our current launch vehicles, including the Long March-5, which is set to conduct its first launch soon, will be able to undertake the country's space activities planned for the coming 10 years.

"But for the nation's long-term space programmes, their capabilities will not be enough."

Beijing sees its multi-billion-dollar space programme as a marker of its

rising global stature and mounting technical expertise, as well as evidence of the ruling Communist Party's success in turning around the fortunes of the once poverty-stricken nation.

The military-run project has plans for a permanent orbiting station by 2020 and eventually to send a human to the moon.

Li said that the Long March-9's diameter and height would be far greater than the Long March-5, while its thrust would be more powerful.

"We need to develop a brand new engine for it to make sure the rocket has sufficient thrust," he said.

Li Jinghong, a designer at the academy, said the rocket would not only be used for missions to the Earth's only natural satellite, but also for other [deep space exploration](#) projects.

The vehicle's diameter "should be eight to 10 metres", and its weight "at least 3,000 metric tonnes", he said.

China currently has a rover, the Jade Rabbit, on the surface of the moon.

The craft, launched as part of the Chang'e-3 lunar mission late last year, has been declared a success by Chinese authorities, although it has been beset by mechanical troubles.

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