

China aims to outstrip NASA with super-powerful rocket

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China is working on a super-powerful rocket that would be capable of delivering heavier payloads into low orbit than NASA, a leading Chinese

space expert was quoted as saying Monday.

By 2030, the Long March-9 rocket under development will be able to carry 140 tonnes into low-Earth orbit—where TV and [earth observation satellites](#) currently fly—said Long Lehao, a senior official from the Chinese Academy of Engineering, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

This compares to the 20 tonnes deliverable by Europe's Ariane 5 rocket or the 64 tonnes by Elon Musk's Falcon Heavy, which in February catapulted one of the US entrepreneur's red Tesla Roadster cars towards Mars.

It would also outstrip the 130 tonnes of NASA's Space Launch System, which is due to become operational in 2020.

China's Long March-9 would have a core stage measuring 10 metres (33 feet) in diameter and boast four powerful boosters, each with a diameter of five metres.

Xinhua quoted Long as saying the rocket could be used in manned lunar landings, [deep space exploration](#) or constructing a [space](#)-based solar power plant.

In addition, China is working on a reusable space [rocket](#), which is expected to make its maiden flight in 2021. The first stage and the boosters will be retrieved after a vertical landing, Long said in a speech in Beijing.

China is pouring billions into its military-run space programme, with hopes of having a crewed space station by 2022, and of sending humans to the Moon in the near future.

The Asian superpower is looking to finally catch up with the US and Russia after years of belatedly matching their space milestones.

China is also planning to build a base on the moon, the state-run Global Times said in early March, citing the Communist Party chief of the China Academy of Space Technology.

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