

CHINA'S ROVER ON MISSION TO UNCOVER MOON'S 'DARK SIDE'

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Giant leap: A Long March 3B rocket lifts off from the Xichang launch centre in Xichang. | Photo Credit: [AFP](#)

China launched a rover early on Saturday destined to land on the far side of the moon, a global first that would boost Beijing's ambitions to become a space superpower, state media said.

The Chang'e-4 lunar probe mission — named after the moon goddess in Chinese mythology — launched on a Long March 3B rocket from the southwestern Xichang launch centre at 1823 GMT, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

The blast-off marked the start of a long journey to the far side of the moon for the Chang'e-4 mission, expected to land around the New Year to carry out experiments and survey the untrodden terrain.

"Chang'e-4 is humanity's first probe to land on and explore the far side of the moon," said the mission's chief commander He Rongwei of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, the main state-owned space contractor.

"This mission is also the most meaningful deep space exploration research project in the world in 2018," Mr. He said, according to the state-run *Global Times*.

Unlike the near side of the moon that is "tidally locked" and always faces the earth, and offers many flat areas to touch down on, the far side is mountainous and rugged.

It was not until 1959 that the Soviet Union captured the first images of the heavily cratered surface, uncloaking some of the mystery of the moon's "dark side".

No lander or rover has ever touched the surface there, positioning China as the first to explore the area. "China, over the past 10 or 20 years, has been ticking off the various firsts that America and the Soviet Union did in the 1960s and 1970s in space exploration," said Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics.

Weighing about 5,854 kg, the GSAT-11 is the "heaviest" satellite built by ISRO.

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