



CHINA PLANS TO LAUNCH MANNED SPACECRAFT SHENZHOU-11 ON MONDAY

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China is preparing to launch a manned spacecraft on Monday, marking a crucial step toward the country's ambition to build and operate its first space station by 2020.

The spacecraft is scheduled to blast off on a Long March-2F carrier rocket at 7.30 a.m. Beijing time from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in western Gansu province, Wu Ping, deputy director of China Manned Space Agency, told reporters Sunday. It will be Beijing's third space-lab mission this year.

The world's second-largest economy has spent billions in the past decade to compete in a space race with the U.S. and Russia, as well as Asian rivals India and Japan, with plans to send an astronaut to the moon by about 2025 and to land an unmanned vehicle on Mars.

Astronauts Jing Haipeng and Chen Dong will dock with orbiting space lab Tiangong-2 within two days. They will stay 30 days in the space lab, which was launched last month.

In 2003, China became the third nation to send a man into space and successfully completed its first docking mission with an orbiting space lab in 2011.

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