

After US, India missions to Mars, China aims for deep space

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Beijing: Under criticism that its well developed space programme focussed more on the Moon while the US and India stole a march over China by branching out into outer space with voyages to Mars, Chinese space experts are now planning missions deeper into the solar systems.

Experts considered missions to Mars, asteroids and Jupiter - and a manned deep-space mission at a recent conference on deep-space exploration held at Harbin, capital of northeast China's Heilongjiang province, official media reported today.

"When exploring the unknown, we should not just follow others. China should be more creative," Liu Jizhong, director of the lunar exploration program and space engineering centre under the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence.

He pointed out that China still needs to tackle key problems, such as how to go into deep space at higher speeds; generating energy and power; and developing space robots that can work in the complicated space environment.Â

The brainstorming came in the backdrop of criticism of China's high-profile space programme focussing more on the Moon after NASA's discovery of flowing water on Mars where Mangalyaan also stole a march last year making India the first country in Asia to reach the red planet.

Terming NASA's announcement of finding the water on Mars "like a bomb that shocked the world", state-run Global Times in its editorial on September 30 said "although some remain sceptical of the conclusions, NASA 's claim has shown serious progress in scientific exploration".

"The US has sent more than 20 spacecraft to Mars since 1964, among which several probes have landed on the surface of the red planet. The Curiosity is still roving Mars and sending back information. NASA is leaving the other space competitors far behind," it said in an editorial titled 'China should dream big in outer space'.

"NASA's far sight and one discovery after another have met our curiosity and gained respect from the world, including the Chinese people. At the same time, its discoveries give us a sense of urgency," it said.

China was the third country to send an astronaut into space. It sent the Jade Rabbit probe to the lunar surface.

"However, while the US has been getting close-up inspections of almost all planets in the solar system, China's Mars probe, Yinghuo 1, lost contact before leaving the Earth orbit," the editorial said.

While Yinghuo 1 could not make it, success of Mangalyaan reaching Mars earned respect in China. The Chinese Foreign Ministry had hailed Mangalyaan's success as "Asia's pride" and "a landmark achievement in humankind's exploration of outer space". Mangalyaan completed a year in Mars orbit on September 24.

India also successfully launched Astrosat, its first space laboratory last month joining an elite club of the US, European Union, Russia and Japan.

At the Harbin conference, Chinese scientists some Chinese scientists have suggested landing a probe on the far side of the moon, which would be unprecedented.

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