

China successfully launches world's most powerful rocket with aim of setting a permanent space s

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Beijing: After the successful launch of its 6th manned spaceflight mission - the Shenzhou-11 in October this year, China on Thursday successfully launched its most powerful heavy-lift rocket which is expected to be used in future space programmes like building a permanent space station and for Moon and Mars missions as the Communist giant seeks to become a major space power.

The newly developed rocket called Long March-5 was launched from the coastal Wenchang Space Launch Centre in southern Hainan Province. The rocket blasted off at around 8:43 PM local time.

An official of the mission declared the launch a success about 40 minutes later, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The Long March-5 is a large, two-stage rocket with a payload capacity of 25 tonnes to low-Earth orbit, the largest of China's carrier rockets.

According to China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), the developer of Long March-5, the rocket uses two kinds of fuel, kerosene and liquid oxygen as well as liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen, rather than highly toxic propellant, making it more environment-friendly and less expensive.

It was expected to be used in China's lunar and Mars exploration programme, state-run People's Daily had reported earlier.

China announced plans to send its Mars mission by 2020. China had also unveiled the designs of its Mars probe and rover in August this year.

The rocket engine development and testing took place at a facility hidden in a valley to the south of Beijing.

Â Â Â Residents living nearby, already used to ground tremors accompanied by deep, explosive blasts, detected a noticeable increase in testing activity in recent years.

The new rocket was launched even as China's experimental space lab currently orbiting the earth with two astronauts on board.

The astronauts who entered the space lab on October 19 were on a 33 day-long space voyage.

China plans to set up its own permanent manned space station by 2022, which could make it the only country to have such a facility in service as the current in-service International Space Station (ISS) will retire by 2024.

- (With agency inputs)