

All systems go for India's moon probe

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NEW DELHI: India readied its first lunar mission today, seeking to convert its new wealth into political and military clout and join an elite group of nations with the know-how to reach space.

In the last year, Asian nations have taken the lead in exploring the moon: Japan and China both sent up spacecraft last year, and India's Chandrayaan-1 will join them in orbit around the moon for a two-year mission designed to map the lunar surface and lay the groundwork for further Indian space expeditions. Chandrayaan means "Moon Craft" in ancient Sanskrit.

"It is a remarkable technological achievement for the country," said S. Satish, a spokesman for the Indian Space Research

Organisation, which plans to launch the 1,400kg satellite from the Sriharikota space centre in southern India.

To date, only the US, Russia, the European Space Agency, Japan and China have sent missions to the moon. The US is the only nation to have landed a man on the lunar surface, doing so for the first time in 1969.

While much of the technology involved in reaching the moon has not changed, analysts say current mapping equipment allows for the exploration of new areas, including below the surface. Of the 11 instruments carried by the satellite, five are Indian, three are from the European Space Agency, two from the US and one from Bulgaria. — AP

SNAPSHOT

Chandrayaan: India's moon mission

PSLV-XL: India's launch rocket

Height	44m
Stages	4
Payload	1,800kg
First launch	1993
Total launches	13

CHANDRAYAAN-1

- ▶ **Project**
India's first ever space mission to go beyond Earth's orbit
- ▶ **Cost:** Four billion rupees (RM 293 million)
- ▶ **Science: 11 instruments** plus impact probe to penetrate lunar surface. Two-year study will map moon's mineralogy and explore its geology

Source: Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)

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