When will Bangladesh reach the moon?





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INDIA, a close neighbour of Bangladesh, in an unprecedented move has sent its first ever rocket to the moon. It is a landmark event not only for India as a nation, but for Asia as a continent. Asia is now well into the marathon of space expeditions which was a prerogative of the west. Before India, two other Asian nations -- Japan and China -- successfully floated their missions to the moon. In space race, I wonder, where is the place of Bangladesh? Can Bangladesh follow what her Asian neighbours have done? Can she burst into the space era with her own rocket at any opportune moment? These are the questions which must be asked at this juncture of history.

The unmanned rocket of India to the moon blasted off from Andhra Pradesh on 22 October 2008. The launching site, Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota, is an island off the Bay of Bengal, very close to Bangladesh. The rocket carried a moon craft named Chandrayaan-1 equipped with many sophisticated machines to conduct scientific experiments and collect data to be analysed by the scientists here on earth. It will look for water or ice in the polar areas and prepare a three-dimensional map of the moon. It will orbit the moon for two years studying its mineral composition and searching for a new source of energy called helium-3. It will also gather information about the origins of the universe. The rocket has been built with Indian technology, in cooperation with the USA and Russia, at a cost of about 80 million dollars. It is claimed to be the cheapest rocket ever built for space work, which brings further laurels for India.

In the history of lunar explorations, the United States first projected spacecraft with man in 1969. Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on its surface. Since then it has sent several other manned and unmanned missions to the moon. NASA now plans a manned trip to the moon by 2020, setting up a human-staffed outpost there. Russia competed USA in moon explorations with her series of Luna missions since 1969. It was in fact Russia that initiated space research with rocket technology. It launched the world's first satellite Sputnik-1 in 1957. Its future plan includes sending cosmonauts to the moon by 2025 and building a lunar station within seven years of landing. European Space Agency, which has so far undertaken a number of lunar missions, plans to build a craft for manned flights around the moon in 2018. All these missions, if implemented, will not only increase human knowledge about the earth's only natural satellite, but also pave a way for extracting resources from there and widening opportunities for space travel.

In Asia, Japan earned the honour of becoming the first space explorer. It launched its first lunar explorer *Kaguya* in September 2007. Following Japan, China sent a craft *Chang'e-1* into lunar orbit in October 2007. Now it plans to land a rover to bring soil and rock samples in 2012. India became the third nation in Asia having the pride of reaching the moon. India plans to land a rover on the moon in 2011, ahead of China. It has also plans for sending a manned mission to space by 2014 and an astronaut to the moon by 2020.