



Enduring legacy

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Relay satellite readied for launch

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Queqiao 2, or Maggie Bridge 2, a relay satellite that will play a major role in China's coming lunar exploration missions, was transported to the launch site on Friday, according to the China National Space Administration.

The administration said in a news release that the spacecraft was carried by an aircraft to Haikou Meilan International Airport in the island province of Hainan and was then transported by road to Wenchang Space Launch Center on the province's eastern coast.

The satellite will undergo pre-launch tests at the launch center as scheduled, the release said, adding that once in orbit, it will relay signals

between ground control and the Chang'e 4, Chang'e 6, Chang'e 7 and Chang'e 8 probes.

"Currently, the facilities at the launch center are in good condition. Preparatory work is underway as planned. Queqiao 2 is scheduled to be launched in the first half of this year," the administration said.

Queqiao 2's predecessor, Queqiao 1, was launched by a Long March 4C carrier rocket from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province in May 2018 and has been working for the country's lunar programs since then.

After the new relay satellite is in orbit, the Chang'e 6 spacecraft is scheduled to land on the lunar surface in the first half of this year, tasked with bringing back samples

from the moon's little-known far side.

Like its predecessor Chang'e 5, the Chang'e 6 spacecraft consists of four components — an orbiter, lander, ascender and reentry module.

The United States, the former Soviet Union and China have brought lunar samples back to Earth, but none has ever obtained soil from the far side of the moon.

Tidal forces on Earth slow the moon's rotation to the point where the same side always faces Earth. The other side, most of which is never visible from Earth, is the moon's far side.

Though the far side had been photographed by spacecraft, no probe had ever touched down on it until China's Chang'e 4 mission, which landed in the South Pole-Aitken Basin in January 2019.