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# CHINA DAILY

中國日報

THURSDAY, February 25, 2021

www.chinadailyhk.com HK \$10

## Mars probe enters parking orbit

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China's Tianwen 1 robotic probe entered its preset parking orbit above Mars on Wednesday and will maintain that orbit for about three months before releasing its landing capsule, the China National Space Administration said.

The spacecraft, which has entered a crucial stage in China's first interplanetary exploration mission after a seven-month space voyage, conducted its third near-Mars deceleration maneuver at 6:29 am and then moved into an orbit with a perigee — the point of orbit closest to a planet — of about 280 kilometers, the administration said in a brief statement.

All seven mission payloads on the probe's orbiter will be gradually activated during its three-month stay in orbit to carry out scientific tasks and also to observe and analyze the landforms and weather of the optimal landing site, it said.

Tianwen 1, the country's first independent Mars mission, was launched by a Long March 5 heavy-lift carrier rocket on July 23 from the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province, kicking off the nation's planetary exploration program.

The 5-metric-ton probe, which consists of two major parts — an orbiter and a landing capsule — has flown for 215 days and about 475 million km on its journey to Mars. The average flight speed was about 100,000 km per hour. Currently, it is about 212 million km from Earth, the space administration said.

The Tianwen 1 mission's ultimate goal is to land a rover in May or June on the southern part of Mars' Utopia Planitia — a large plain within Utopia, the largest recognized impact basin in the solar system — to conduct scientific surveys.

Weighing about 240 kilograms, the rover, which has yet to be named, has six wheels and four solar panels and will be able to move 200 meters per

hour on Mars. It carries six scientific instruments including a multispectral camera, ground-penetrating radar and a meteorological measurer, and is expected to work for about three months on the planet.

If the highly autonomous machine functions well, it will become mankind's sixth rover to be deployed on Mars, following five predecessors from the United States.

Tianwen 1 is the world's 46th Mars exploration mission since October 1969, when the former Soviet Union launched the first Mars-bound spacecraft. Only 19 of those missions have been successful.

If Tianwen 1 fulfills all of its three objectives — orbiting Mars for comprehensive observation, landing on the planet's surface and deploying its rover to conduct scientific operations — it will become the world's first Mars expedition to accomplish all three goals with one probe, mission scientists said previously.