

**Washington, United States**

**F**ifty years ago on Saturday, American astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first humans in history to set foot on the Moon, an event watched on television by half a billion people.

Their lunar module, named "Eagle," touched down at 2018 GMT (4:18pm ET) on July 20, 1969.

A little over six hours later, at 0256 GMT, Armstrong placed his left foot on the lunar surface, declaring: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

NASA has been in overdrive for several weeks to mark the anniversary, with exhibits and events nationwide but most notably at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida and the Johnson Space Center in

Houston, Texas.

On Saturday, Vice President Mike Pence is due to deliver a speech from the Kennedy Space Center, from where Armstrong, Aldrin and Michael Collins, the third crew member took off. All three men were born in 1930.

Pence sent shockwaves through the industry in his last major space speech in March, when he advanced the deadline to return humans to the Moon by four years, from 2028 to 2024.

It is within this charged context, with President Donald Trump publicly questioning NASA's plans to return to the Moon to test technology for Mars, that the US is celebrating the anniversary of the epoch-making Apollo 11 mission.

**'World in my window'**

Collins, 88, has remained the more active of the surviving

Apollo veterans, and frequently shares lyrical recollections of the mission.

Speaking at a Washington event on Thursday, he said that while the Moon itself was breathtaking seen up close, it was the view of Earth that has stayed with him and shaped his perspective.

"When we rolled out and looked at (the Moon), oh, it was an awesome sphere," he

said.

"The Sun was behind it, so it was illuminated by a rim of gold which made the strangest appearances of the craters and crater pits, the contrast between the whiter than white and darker than dark."

As magnificent as that view was, it was "nothing compared to this other window

out there," Collins continued.

"Out there was this little pea about the size of your thumb-nail at arm's length: blue, white, very shiny, you get the blue of the oceans, white of the clouds, streaks of rust we call continents, such a beautiful gorgeous tiny thing, nestled into this black velvet of the rest of the universe."

While Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were on the surface, ex-fighter pilot Collins remained in lunar orbit where he was in touch with ground control, providing them updates on his position.

"I said to Mission control, 'Hey, Houston, I've got the world in my window'."

**Cold War victory**

By placing men on the Moon, the US achieved the ultimate victory in the Space Race after losing the initial heats to the

Soviet Union, which was first to put a satellite and then a man in space.

The undertaking, announced by president John F Kennedy in 1961 and partly spurred by the Bay of Pigs crisis, involved enormous spending rivaled in scope only by the construction of the Panama Canal and the Manhattan Project.

It was a resounding achievement not just from a technical perspective but also diplomatic, as the two superpowers jostled for global prestige in the Cold War.

Trump has relaunched the race to re-conquer the Moon -- this time with the first woman -- and to journey onwards to the Red Planet.

But the deadlines -- 2024 and 2033 respectively -- appear unrealistic and have caused turbulence within the space agency.

# First step on another world

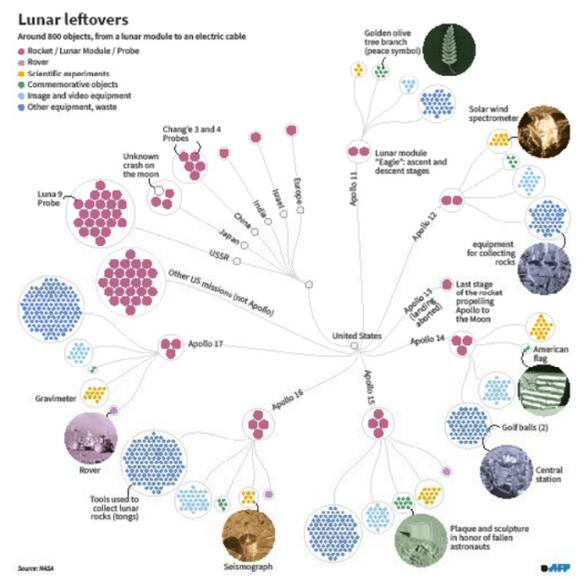
US Astronaut Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin is shown walking near the Lunar Module 20 July 1969 during the Apollo 11 space mission.



This photo released by NASA shows the crew of the Apollo 11 lunar landing mission L-R Neil Armstrong, commander, Michael Collins, command module pilot and Edwin E. Aldrin Jr, lunar module pilot, 01 May 1969



US President Donald Trump speaks with Apollo 11 crew member Buzz Aldrin on July 19, 2019, at the White House in Washington, DC, during a ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Moon landing.



**The exploration of space in key dates**

<p><b>1957: SPUTNIK</b></p> <p><b>On October 4, 1957,</b> Moscow launches the first artificial space satellite, Sputnik 1, ushering in the Cold War tussle for the cosmos.</p> <p>The beach ball-sized aluminium sphere takes 98 minutes to orbit the Earth and sends back the first message from space, simple "beep-beep-beep" radio signals.</p> <p><b>On November 3, Sputnik 2</b> carries the first living being to fully orbit the Earth, a small street dog called Laika. She dies after a few hours.</p>	<p><b>1961: GAGARIN, 1ST MAN</b></p> <p><b>On April 12, 1961,</b> Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin becomes the first man in space, completing a single, 108-minute orbit.</p> <p>Twenty-three days later, Alan Shepard is the first American in space when he makes a 15-minute trip on May 5.</p> <p>The Cold War rivals are only joined in space by a third country in 2003 when China sends up Yang Liwei onboard Earth orbiter Shenzou V.</p>	<p><b>1969: ON MOON</b></p> <p><b>On July 21, 1969,</b> US astronaut Neil Armstrong is the first man to step onto the Moon, his teammate Edwin Aldrin joining him around 20 minutes later.</p> <p>Between 1969 and 1972, 12 astronauts -- all American -- walked on the Moon as part of NASA's Apollo program.</p>	<p><b>1971: SPACE STATION</b></p> <p><b>On April 19, 1971,</b> the Soviet Union launches the first orbital space station, Salyut 1.</p> <p>Construction of the still-operating International Space Station (ISS) starts in 1998.</p> <p>The ISS, in which 16 countries participate, took over from the Russian space station Mir, which was brought back to Earth in 2001 after 15 years in orbit.</p>	<p><b>1976: MARS</b></p> <p><b>On July 20, 1976,</b> US spacecraft Viking 1 becomes the first to successfully land on Mars and send back images of the Red Planet.</p> <p>The robot Opportunity explored Mars between 2004 and 2018, with NASA's Curiosity Rover still active there.</p>	<p><b>1981: SPACE SHUTTLE</b></p> <p><b>On April 12, 1981,</b> the US space shuttle Columbia, the first reusable manned spacecraft, makes its first voyage.</p> <p>It is followed by Challenger, Discovery, Atlantis and Endeavour, which serve the ISS until the shuttle programme winds up in 2011.</p> <p>The United States has since depended on Russia to transport its astronauts to the ISS. Two US shuttles were destroyed in flight, with the loss of 14 astronauts: Challenger in 1986 and Columbia in 2003.</p>	<p><b>1990: HUBBLE</b></p> <p><b>On April 25, 1990,</b> the Hubble is the first space telescope to be placed into orbit, at 547 kilometres (340 miles) from Earth.</p> <p>Thirteen metres (42 feet) long, Hubble revolutionises astronomy, allowing scientists to observe the planets and most distant stars and galaxies.</p>
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