

## Giant 'UFO' balloon lifts off in Alice

By Jano Gibson

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**It looks like an giant elongated jelly fish floating towards the edge of space - and as it drifts from Alice Springs towards Queensland today, some people might think aliens have arrived.**

"Oh, some people will think it is a UFO," Associate Professor Ravi Sood said this morning after launching the 300-metre-long scientific balloon.

"At the moment it is absolutely spectacular.

"You can see it from miles around because it so big and the sky is clear and it is very easy to detect with the naked eye - as it will be when it gets to 40 kilometres."

The white mega-balloon will reach the outer limit of the stratosphere, where it will undertake high-energy astrophysics experiments as it travels at 50 metres per second in freezing winds.

"[The instruments on the balloon] look for x-rays and gamma rays coming from special types of objects in our universe," Professor Sood said.

"Things like black holes and exploding stars and fast-spinning stars - they produce copious amounts of x-rays.

"And if you detect these and study the nature of their mission, you can tell a lot about the type of objects that are out there in the universe."

The giant balloon is expected to reach the outskirts of Longreach in Queensland within about 40 hours.

But Professor Sood says the balloon's flight will be terminated before it nears heavily-populated areas.

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*A giant balloon lifts off from Alice Springs.*

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*– Professor Sood*