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NASA probe captures first colour image of Pluto

WASHINGTON: NASA's New Horizons spacecraft has sent back its first colour image of the dwarf planet Pluto and its largest moon Charon, after more than nine years of travelling through the solar system.

The new photo, taken on April 9 from a distance of

about 115 million kilometres, is already providing insights about Pluto and Charon, as well as suggestions of the science to come when New Horizons flies by the Pluto system on July 14, NASA said.

The image shows "tantalising glimpses of this

system," Jim Green, director of NASA's Planetary Science Division, said. "You can immediately see a number of differences between Pluto and Charon," he added.

Charon is dimmer than Pluto. The contrast may be due to a difference in composition of the two

bodies, or it could even be caused by a previously unseen atmosphere on Charon, Mr. Green said.

The uncertainty should clear up this summer, when New Horizons gets history's first good look at the two frigid, faraway objects.

— PTI



Pluto (foreground) and its largest moon, Charon. — PHOTO: AFP/NASA