

Space shuttle Discovery fuels for pre-dawn launch

April 5 2010, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



Tourists view Space Shuttle Discovery after the Rotating Service Structure had moved away from the shuttle during final preparations, Sunday, April 4, 2010, in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Discovery is scheduled to launch April 5 on a mission to the International Space Station. (AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee)

(AP) -- NASA fueled Discovery late Sunday for a pre-dawn launch to the International Space Station, one of the last few shuttle flights.

Discovery was scheduled to blast off at 6:21 a.m., nearly an hour before sunrise. The shuttle and its crew of seven will deliver spare parts and science experiments to the nearly completed space station.

Forecasters put the odds of good weather at 80 percent.

Fueling was delayed because of a voltage spike in one of Discovery's fuel cells. Engineers suspected the brief surge was related to the cockpit lights, and said it posed no problem for liftoff.

Only four shuttle flights remain. NASA plans to retire the fleet this fall.

Once that happens, the space station will rely exclusively on other countries' vessels for crews and supplies. Three new residents arrived Sunday - one American and two Russians. They wished everyone a happy Easter after their Russian spacecraft docked.

The station's population will temporarily swell from six to 13 when Discovery arrives. Four will be women, the most ever in space at once. And two of the astronauts will be Japanese - another first. Scores of journalists and space officials from Japan descended on the launch site to witness the big event. Area roads also were jammed with post-Easter vacationers and spring breakers, all hoping to view a launch as the program winds down.

Discovery's mission will last nearly two weeks and coincide with the 29th anniversary of the first shuttle flight on April 12. Three days later, President Barack Obama will visit the Cape Canaveral area to outline his post-shuttle plans for NASA. Obama already has canceled NASA's follow-up moon program.

This is expected to be the last [shuttle launch](#) in darkness. Discovery was supposed to fly two weeks ago, which would have meant an afternoon [liftoff](#). But unusually cold weather over the winter stalled launch preparations and drove the flight into the wee hours. Shuttle commander Alan Poindexter and his crew will work the graveyard shift in orbit.

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