

Japan enters commercial space race

May 16 2012



Japan's H-IIA rocket lifts off from the launch pad at the Tanegashima space centre in 2011. Japan will put a commercial satellite into space on Friday, officials said, in its first foray into the European- and Russian-dominated world of contract launches.

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The H-IIA rocket, which was developed by Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and has been launched 20 times since 2001, will carry a South Korean payload, a JAXA official said.

The satellite, the KOMPSAT-3, was developed by the Korea Aerospace Research Institute of South Korea to carry out [earth observation](#), officials said.

The rocket has been operated by [Mitsubishi Heavy Industries](#) (MHI) since its 2007 privatisation, JAXA spokesman Masashi Okada said.

Its last six launches were Japanese government-related missions.

"With the success of this commercial launch, we hope to build customers' trust and get the next order, entering a business dominated by European Ariane and Russian Platon rockets," said MHI's Kenichi Nakamura.

The South Korean institute paid several billions of yen (tens of millions of dollars), "the cheapest price in an international auction", the Sankei Shimbun reported, citing the institute. MHI declined to confirm the report.

The rocket is scheduled to lift off at 1:39 am on Friday (1639 GMT Thursday) from JAXA's Tanegashima Space Center on Tanegashima Island in western Japan.

The rocket will also carry JAXA's Shizuku satellite, which will be used to monitor the circulation of global [ocean currents](#), officials said.

European operator Arianespace successfully launched its [Ariane 5 rocket](#) with a Japanese and a Vietnamese satellite onboard from French Guiana on Tuesday.

The 4.5-tonne Japanese satellite, replace an existing orbiter, will provide television services for the whole of the country, as well as for Southeast Asia.

The smaller Vietnamese version will provide television, radio and telephone services in Vietnam.

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Citation: Japan enters commercial space race (2012, May 16) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-05-japan-commercial-space.html>

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