

Iran looks to put Persian cat into space

September 16 2013



A capsule, codenamed Pishgam (Pioneer), that was sent into space containing a live monkey is displayed in Tehran's Azadi Square (Freedom Square) on February 10, 2013.

Iran has settled on a Persian cat as the best candidate for its latest trial for a manned space mission it hopes to make by 2020, state media reported Monday.

The feline would be following in the footsteps of a menagerie of dogs and monkeys who were among the [early stars](#) of the US and Soviet [space](#) programmes in the 1960s.

But the announcement of its planned foray into the atmosphere aboard Iran's Kavoshgar satellite carrier prompted an outcry from animal rights groups.

Top space official Mohammad Ebrahimi told the state IRNA news agency that the mission could go ahead by March next year but previous [launch](#) dates have been put off without official explanation.

Ebrahimi said the Persian cat was the favoured candidate for the mission after tests had been conducted on a number of animals.

His announcement drew an angry response from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

"Iran's archaic experiment... is a throwback to the primitive techniques of the 1950s," the animal rights group's spokesman Ben Williamson said.

"European and US space agencies stopped sending animals into space not only because it is unethical but also because they turned out to be poor models for the human experience and because superior, more scientific non-animal methods of study are now available."

Iran in January claimed to have successfully launched a live monkey into space and have it land safely back on Earth.

The claim was disputed, however, when at an official press conference a different monkey appeared to be presented to the media.

Iran's first attempt to send a monkey into space failed in September 2011.

Iran, which first put a satellite into orbit in 2009, has previously sent a rat, turtles and worms into space.

Iran's space programme has prompted concern among Western governments, which suspect it is cover for an attempt to master the technology that would be required to deliver a nuclear warhead.

Iran denies any such ambition.

The Persian is the most popular breed of feline in the United States, according to the Cat Fanciers' Association.

It draws its name from the historic name for Iran, where it has a recorded history dating back centuries before the time of Christ.

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Citation: Iran looks to put Persian cat into space (2013, September 16) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-09-iran-persian-cat-space.html>

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