

New Japan satellite to survey disasters, rain forests

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Japan's H-IIA rocket moves to the launching pad at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) Tanegashima Space Center in Kagoshima prefecture, Japan's southern island of Kyushu on February 27, 2014

Japan is scheduled to launch a new mapping satellite on Saturday that will be used to survey damage from natural disasters and changes affecting rain forests.

The Advanced Land Observing Satellite-2 (ALOS-2) will be released by

the nation's H-IIA rocket, which will lift off shortly after noon (0300 GMT) Saturday, according to the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).

ALOS-2 will be able to monitor scars left by [natural disasters](#) as well as progress made in reconstruction, JAXA said.

The service is important for Japan, which sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire and experiences 20 percent of all [major earthquakes](#) felt by humans every year.

Memories are still fresh of the deadly 9.0-magnitude earthquake in March 2011, which released a killer tsunami that destroyed the northern Pacific coast and triggered the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

The volcanic island nation is routinely hit by earthquakes and typhoons, with scientists expecting Mount Fuji to erupt sometime soon.

The [satellite](#) is different from spy satellites that Japan already has to monitor risk states such as North Korea.

The new satellite, nicknamed "Daichi-2", will "conduct a health check mainly of the Earth's land areas in detail," JAXA project manager Shinichi Suzuki said in a statement.

Daichi-2 will collect data related to deformation of the Earth's crust, but also the impact of floods and landslides, he said.

The satellite's predecessor was used to monitor damage caused by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, Suzuki said.

The device uses a special radar to observe the planet's surface even at night, during bad weather and even through vegetation, JAXA said.

JAXA plans to use the new satellite to regularly study tropical rain forests, which are difficult to observe because of the thick clouds that frequently cover them. It will also be used to observe snow and ice conditions in the polar areas.

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