

Japan asteroid probe to lift off Monday after delay

November 29 2014



In this file photo, a rocket is seen lifting off from the space centre on Japan's southern island of Tanegashima, on May 24, 2014

Japan on Monday will launch a space probe on a six-year mission to mine a distant asteroid after the event was postponed due to bad weather, officials said.

Hayabusa2 is now scheduled to blast off aboard Japan's main H-IIA rocket from Tanegashima Space Center in southern Japan at 1:22 pm

(0422 GMT), the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency said Saturday.

The agency had originally planned to launch the rocket on Sunday only weeks after a European spacecraft's historic landing on a comet captivated the world's attention.

But a forecast of thick cloud over the weekend forced the agency to delay the launch.

The 31 billion yen (\$260 million) project is sending a probe towards the unpoetically-named 1999 JU3 asteroid in [deep space](#).

It will blast a crater in the asteroid to collect virgin materials unexposed to millennia of [solar wind](#) and radiation, in the hope of answering some fundamental questions about life and the universe.

Hayabusa2, about the size of a domestic refrigerator, is expected to reach the asteroid in mid-2018 and will spend around 18 months studying the surface.

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