

Japan rocket carrying UAE Mars probe ready for Monday launch

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This June 1, 2020, file rendering provided by Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre shows the Hope probe. A Japanese H-IIA rocket carrying a United Arab Emirates Mars spacecraft has been placed on the launch pad for Monday's scheduled liftoff for the Arab world's first interplanetary mission, officials said Sunday, July 19, 2020, in Japan. The launch of the orbiter—named Amal, or Hope—from Tanegashima Space Center on a small southern Japanese island was initially scheduled for this past Wednesday, but was delayed due to bad weather in the region. (Alexander McNabb/MBRSC via AP, File)

A Japanese H-IIA rocket carrying a United Arab Emirates Mars spacecraft has been placed on the launch pad for Monday's scheduled liftoff for the Arab world's first interplanetary mission, officials said Sunday.

The launch of the orbiter—named "Amal" in Arabic, or "Hope"—from Tanegashima Space Center on a small southern Japanese island was initially scheduled for this past Wednesday, but was delayed due to bad weather in the region.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, the provider of the H-IIA rocket, announced Sunday that the launch would proceed at 6:58 a.m. Monday (2158 GMT Sunday). The preparation has been completed, and the rocket is now on the launch pad, Mitsubishi said.

Hope is expected to reach Mars in February 2021, the year the UAE celebrates 50 years since its formation. A successful Hope mission would be a major step for this OPEC-member nation home to the skyscraper-studded tourist destination of Dubai. The Emirates have set ambitious plans for space, including pledging to build the first inhabitable human settlement on Mars by 2117.

While raising eyebrows with that goal, the UAE has successfully built a space program with local talent working out of the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Center in Dubai. The Hope probe was built here by a program cooperating with other nations to quickly reach out to the stars. The UAE already sent its first astronaut to space last year on an eight-day mission to the International Space Station.

"It sends a very strong message to the Arab youth that if the UAE is able to reach Mars in less than 50 years, they could do much more," Omran

Sharaf, the project director of Emirates Mars Mission, told The Associated Press on Sunday as his colleagues prepared for the launch.



Omran Sharaf, the project director for the Emirates' Hope space probe to Mars, speaks on his mobile phone at the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Center in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Sunday, July 19, 2020. A Japanese H-IIA rocket carrying a United Arab Emirates Mars spacecraft has been placed on the launch pad for Monday's scheduled liftoff for the Arab world's first interplanetary mission, officials said Sunday. (AP Photo/Jon Gambrell)

Two other Mars missions are planned in the coming days by the U.S. and China. Japan has its own Martian moon mission planned for 2024.

Hope will carry instruments to study the upper atmosphere and monitor seasonal changes in the climate on Mars. It is scheduled to circle the red planet for at least two years. The UAE says it will provide a complete view of the Martian atmosphere during different seasons for the first time.

A newcomer in space development, the UAE has so far successfully launched three observation satellites, but has not gone beyond the Earth's orbit. Hope may change that.

The Emiratis involved in the program also acknowledged it represented a step forward for the Arab world, the home of mathematicians and scientists for centuries before the wars and chaos that have gripped wide swathes of it in recent times.

"So the region has been going through tough times in the past decades, if not centuries," Sharaf said. "Now we have the case of the UAE, a country that's moving forward with its plans, looking at the future and the future of region also."

"Because of accepting differences, because of coexistence and having people from different backgrounds living together, we were able to move forward."

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