

SpaceX again postpones Japanese moon lander launch

December 1 2022



SpaceX has postponed the launch of the world's first private lander to the Moon aboard a Falcon 9 rocket like the one seen here, for further safety checks.

SpaceX on Wednesday postponed the launch of the world's first private

lander to the Moon, a mission undertaken by Japanese firm ispace.

A Falcon 9 rocket was scheduled to blast off at 3:37 am (0837 GMT) on Thursday from Cape Canaveral in the US state of Florida, but SpaceX said further checks on the vehicle had led to a delay.

"After further inspections of the launch vehicle and data review, we're standing down from tomorrow's launch of @ispace_inc's HAKUTO-R Mission 1; a new target launch date will be shared once confirmed," the firm tweeted.

Until now, only the United States, Russia and China have managed to put a robot on the lunar surface.

The mission by ispace is the first of a program called Hakuto-R.

The lander would touch down around April 2023 on the visible side of the Moon, in the Atlas crater, according to a company statement.

The delay came after the launch had already been postponed by a day due to the need for additional pre-flight checks, SpaceX and ispace said on Wednesday.

Measuring just over 2 by 2.5 meters, the lander carries on board a 10-kilogram rover named Rashid, built by the United Arab Emirates.

The oil-rich country is a newcomer to the space race but counts recent successes including sending a probe into Mars' orbit last year. If it succeeds, Rashid will be the Arab world's first Moon mission.

"We have achieved so much in the six short years since we first began conceptualizing this project in 2016," said ispace CEO Takeshi Hakamada.

Hakuto was one of five finalists in the international Google Lunar XPrize competition, a challenge to land a rover on the Moon before a 2018 deadline, which ended without a winner. But some of the projects are still ongoing.

Another finalist, from the Israeli organization SpaceIL, failed in April 2019 to become the first privately-funded mission to achieve the feat, after crashing into the surface while attempting to land.

ispace, which has just 200 employees, says it "aims to extend the sphere of human life into space and create a sustainable world by providing high-frequency, low-cost transportation services to the Moon."

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Citation: SpaceX again postpones Japanese moon lander launch (2022, December 1) retrieved 14 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-12-spacex-postpones-japanese-moon-lander.html>

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