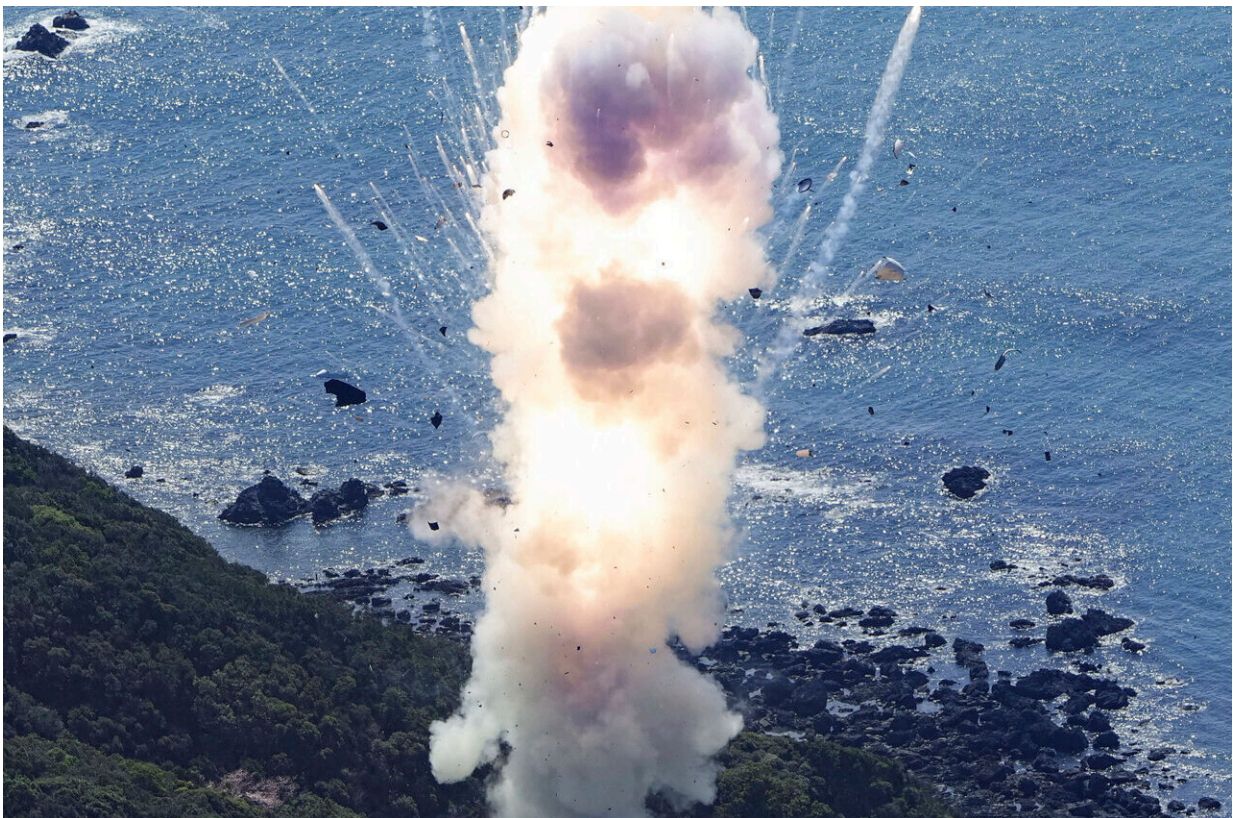


Commercial rocket trying to put a satellite into orbit explodes moments after liftoff in Japan

March 13 2024, by Yuri Kageyama



Space One's Kairos rocket explodes after liftoff from a launch pad in Kushimoto, Wakayama prefecture, western Japan, Wednesday, March 13, 2024. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

A commercial rocket trying to put a satellite into orbit was intentionally exploded shortly after liftoff Wednesday morning in central Japan following a problem that's still under investigation.

Space One was aiming to be Japan's first private sector success at putting a satellite into orbit.

Online video showed the Kairos [rocket](#) blasting off in a mountainous area filled with trees then exploding five seconds later. A huge plume of smoke engulfed the area, and flames shot up in some spots. Sprurts of water were shown trying to put out the blaze.

Live footage on public broadcaster NHK showed debris scattering from the sky and later charred pieces were shown strewn about on the ground.

No injuries were reported and the fire was brought under control, according to the fire department for Kushimoto city in Wakayama prefecture.

The launch was halted five seconds after liftoff but the problem that was detected by the rocket's automated system was unclear and still under investigation, according to Space One.

It occurred during step two of the launch, with the first step being liftoff, and all the pieces of the rocket landed on Space One's property, the company said.

"We are taking what happened in a positive way and remain prepared to take up the next challenge," President Masakazu Toyoda told reporters.



Space One's Kairos rocket is launched before it explodes after liftoff from a launch pad in Kushimoto, Wakayama prefecture, western Japan, Wednesday, March 13, 2024. The rocket touted as Japan's first from the private sector to go into orbit exploded shortly after takeoff Wednesday, livestreamed video showed. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

The rocket was supposed to have sent a government-made satellite into orbit around Earth to gather various information, including monitoring possible dangers from rocket launches from neighboring North Korea.

But one of its main purposes was for Japan to play catch-up as rocket launches here have fallen behind that of the U.S. and China. The launch has been delayed several times.

Toyoda and other officials stressed that [space travel](#) succeeds only after multiple failures. He even refused to call the aborted [launch](#) a failure, and declined to reveal the costs or when the investigation might be completed.

Tokyo-based Space One was set up in 2018, with investments from major Japanese companies, including Canon Electronics, IHI, Shimizu and major banks. It's hoping to eventually offer space services and travel.



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Japan's main space exploration effort has been led by the government under JAXA, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, which has developed various rockets, sent a spacecraft to the moon and brought back asteroid samples for research.

Japan's companies are aiming to become a larger part of the growing global space business, as exemplified by ventures abroad like Elon Musk's Space X.

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