

Beat: News

Weather forces second delay for Japan's asteroid probe

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USPA News - Japan's six-year mission to obtain samples from a distant asteroid has been delayed for a second time and is now scheduled to launch on Wednesday, officials said on Sunday, warning that further delays are possible due to continuing bad weather at the space center. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said a decision to delay the launch was taken at a meeting on Sunday after the latest weather forecast called for strong winds on Monday afternoon, when the Hayabusa2 probe was expected to lift off aboard the H-IIA rocket from the Tanegashima Space Center in southern Japan.

Lift-off is now scheduled for Wednesday at 1:22:04 p.m. local time (0422 GMT). The probe's launch was initially scheduled for Sunday afternoon but JAXA was forced to call off the launch on Friday due to a weather forecast calling for thick clouds, including a freezing layer, near the space center. "The launch may be delayed further depending on weather conditions and other factors," officials cautioned on Sunday. Hayabusa2 is expected to arrive at the 1999 JU3 asteroid in deep space in mid-2018, after which it will land on the surface and detonate an explosive device to take samples. JAXA hopes the samples will provide an insight into the origin and evolution of the solar system and the raw materials of life. After spending about 1.5 year on the surface of the asteroid, the probe will take the samples to Earth, where it is scheduled to arrive in late 2020. The launch of Hayabusa2 comes just weeks after the European Space Agency's Philae probe made history by becoming the first spacecraft to land on a comet. Japan's mission is the successor of Hayabusa, which landed on the 25143 Itokawa asteroid in late 2005 to take samples. Hayabusa returned to Earth in June 2010, making it the first time a sample had been collected from the surface of an asteroid.

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