

# ARAB 'HOPE' TO MARS TAKES OFF FROM JAPAN

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From West Asia, with hope: A rocket carrying the 'Hope' probe blasting off from the Tanegashima Space Centre in southwestern Japan on Monday. **AFPHANDOUT**

The first Arab space mission to Mars, an unmanned probe dubbed "Hope", blasted off from Japan on Monday on a mission to reveal more about the atmosphere of the Red Planet.

The Japanese rocket carrying the probe developed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) lifted off from the Tanegashima Space Centre in southern Japan right on schedule at 6.58 a.m. local time. The launch of the probe, known as "Al-Amal" in Arabic, had twice been delayed because of bad weather, but the Monday lift-off appeared smooth and successful.

## Excitement in UAE

An hour later, a live feed showed people applauding in the Japanese control room as the probe successfully detached. In Dubai, the launch was met with rapturous excitement and blanket media coverage, with the Burj Khalifa lit up hours before lift-off with a symbolic 10-second countdown in anticipation.

"We proudly announce the successful launch of the Hope probe," Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum said in a tweet. "The ground control station in Dubai has received the first signal from the probe after its solar panels were successfully deployed to charge its batteries. Our 493 million km journey to the Red Planet starts here."

Only the United States, India, the former Soviet Union, and the European Space Agency have successfully sent missions to orbit the fourth planet from the sun, while China is preparing to launch its first Mars rover later this month.

## Distance from Earth

The Emirati project is one of three racing to Mars, including Tianwen-1 from China and Mars 2020 from the United States, taking advantage of a period when the Earth and Mars are nearest. In October, Mars will be a comparatively close 38.6 million miles (62.07 million kilometres) from Earth, according to NASA.

"Hope" is expected to enter Mars orbit by February 2021, marking the year of the 50th anniversary of the unification of the UAE, an alliance of seven emirates.

Unlike the two other Mars ventures scheduled for this year, it will not land on the Red Planet, but instead orbit it for a whole Martian year, or 687 days.

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