

NASA PUTS OFF ARTEMIS MOON ROCKET LAUNCH FOR SECOND TIME

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Artemis I rocket sits on launch pad 39-B at Kennedy Space Center. AFP/KEVIN DIETSCH

For the second time in five days, NASA on Saturday halted a countdown in progress and postponed a planned attempt to launch the debut test flight of its giant, next-generation rocket, the first mission of the agency's moon-to-Mars Artemis programme.

The latest attempt to launch the 32-story-tall Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and its Orion capsule was scrubbed after repeated attempts by technicians to correct a leak of super-cooled liquid hydrogen propellant being pumped into the vehicle's core-stage fuel tanks.

Besides struggling to remedy the leak itself, the difficulty caused mission managers to fall behind in the countdown, leaving too little time to complete pre-launch preparations before liftoff.

Pre-flight operations were officially called off for the day by Artemis I launch director Charlie Blackwell Thompson about three hours before the targeted two-hour launch window was due to open at 2:17 p.m. EDT (1817 GMT).

There was no immediate word on a time frame for retrying to launch the mission, dubbed Artemis I. But NASA could schedule another attempt for Monday or Tuesday. "Engineers are continuing to gather additional data," NASA said.

An initial launch try on Monday was foiled by 11th-hour technical problems that surfaced during countdown, including a different leaky fuel line, a faulty temperature sensor and some cracks in insulation foam.

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