

UAE to launch Mars probe Friday after weather delay

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● This will mark the 50th anniversary of the unification of the UAE

AFP | Dubai

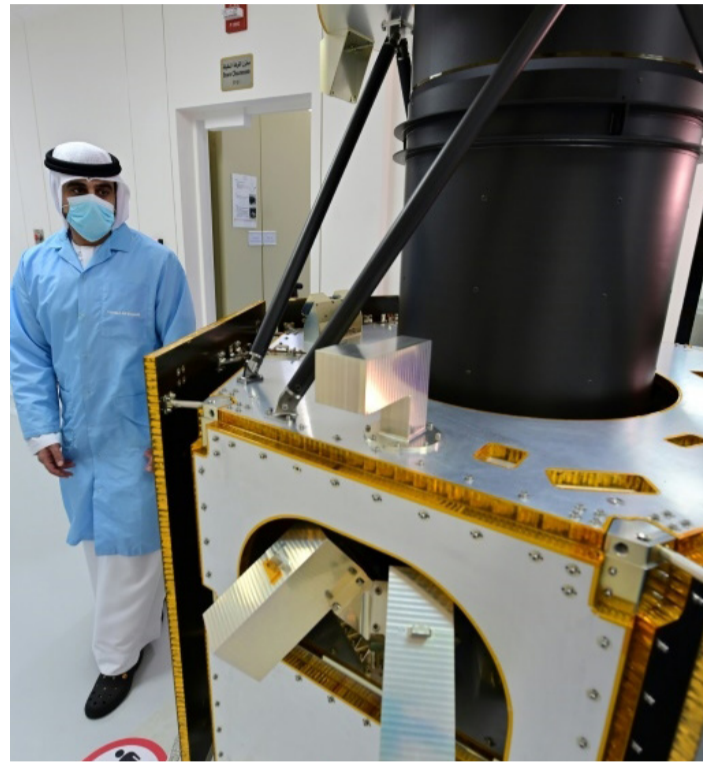
The United Arab Emirates said it plans to launch its “Hope” Mars probe on Friday local time from Japan’s Tanegashima Space Center after a two-day delay due to poor weather there.

A rocket is due to blast off at 5:43 am local time (20:43 GMT Thursday) carrying the unmanned spacecraft that is bound to orbit the Red Planet in the Arab world’s first interplanetary mission.

The launch was postponed from 2051 GMT yesterday because of inclement weather at the remote Japanese launch site, but remains well within the launch window which runs until August 13.

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 the period when the Earth and Mars are nearest: some 55 million kilometres (34 million miles) apart.

“Hope” -- or Al-Amal in Arabic -- is expected to reach Mars’s orbit by February 2021, marking the 50th anniversary of the unification of the UAE, an alliance of seven emirates. Once there, it will loop the



An engineer observes a model of a previous UAE space project, the satellite KhalifaSat

planet for a whole Martian year, or 687 days.

The probe is expected to detach from the launch rocket about an hour after blast-off, which is when the UAE Mars mission’s deputy project manager Sarah al-Amiri said the real excitement will begin.

“In my heart of hearts, I’m looking forward to the initial 24 hours after separation, and that’s where we see the results of our work,” said Amiri, who is also Minister of State for Advanced Sciences.

“It is when we first get the signal, when we know that every part of the spacecraft is functioning, when the solar panels are deployed, when we hit our trajectory and are headed towards Mars,” she said earlier this month.

Keiji Suzuki from Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, which is carrying the Hope probe into space, had already warned on Monday that thunderstorms forecast could delay the launch.

Big ambitions

While the objective of the Mars mission is to provide a comprehensive image of the weather dynamics in the Red Planet’s atmosphere, the probe is a foundation for a much bigger goal -- building a human settlement on Mars within the next 100 years.

The UAE also wants the project to serve as a source of inspiration for Arab youth.

Dubai has hired architects to imagine what a Martian city might look like and build it in its desert as “Science City”, at a cost of around 500 million dirhams (135 million dollars).

Several dozen probes -- most of them American -- have set off for the Red Planet since the 1960s. Many never made it that far, or failed to land.



The control room of the Mars Mission at the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre in Dubai.

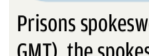
News in brief



Philippines to use police in house-to-house searches for COVID-19 cases

◆ Philippine authorities and police will carry out house-to-house searches for COVID-19 patients to prevent wider transmission, a minister said on Tuesday, amid soaring death and infection numbers and some areas returning to a stricter lockdown. Interior Minister Eduardo Azo urged the public to report cases in their neighbourhoods, warning that anyone infected who refused to cooperate faced imprisonment. The tough approach comes during a week where the Philippines recorded Southeast Asia biggest daily jump in coronavirus deaths.

US says it executes Daniel Lee



◆ The US federal government yesterday carried out its first execution in 17 years, putting to death convicted murderer Daniel Lee after the Supreme Court cleared the way overnight, a US Bureau of Prisons spokeswoman said. Lee was pronounced dead at 8:07 a.m. EDT (12:07 GMT), the spokeswoman, Kristie Breshears, said by phone.

◆ China has described a primary by Hong Kong’s pro-democracy parties as a “serious provocation”, warning that some campaigning may have breached a new security law recently imposed on the city.



◆ President Donald Trump said he has a “very good” working relationship with America’s top infectious disease specialist, despite repeatedly undercutting the respected scientist amid the coronavirus pandemic. For several days Trump has hurled criticism at Anthony Fauci, a senior member of his coronavirus taskforce, who has warned -- sometimes in blunt language -- that US officials and citizens have not done enough to fight the pandemic. “I have a very good relationship with Dr Fauci,” Trump told reporters, adding: “I find him to be a very nice person. I don’t always agree with him.”



◆ At least 15 people were killed and dozens missing after flash floods left hundreds of houses buried in mud on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, authorities said yesterday. A search and rescue operation was underway to find missing people feared swept away by floods and mud after three rivers in North Luwu regency overflowed due to torrential rains, the island’s disaster mitigation agency said.



◆ Chinese authorities have pressed criminal charges against 23 people for illegal building alterations that led to the collapse of a quarantine hotel in which 29 people died and 42 were injured in March, state media reported yesterday. The 66-room Xinjia Hotel in southern China’s Quanzhou city collapsed on March 7, burying dozens of people who had been made to quarantine there because of their recent travel to regions hard hit by COVID-19.



◆ India’s IT hub Bangalore went into a new week-long lockdown Tuesday as the number of coronavirus cases surged, while economic data from Singapore to Britain revealed the shocking extent of the damage wrought by the global pandemic. India joins a raft of countries and cities across the globe to reimpose restrictions in the face of new outbreaks of the disease.

Thailand halts flights after Egyptian breaks quarantine with virus

Bangkok

Thailand suspended all inbound flights Tuesday after an Egyptian soldier skipped self-quarantine and went to a shopping mall before testing positive for COVID-19.

The kingdom has not recorded a domestic case of the virus for 50 days, winning praise for its strict lockdown which has so far controlled infections.

The country had been gingerly reopening its airspace, hoping to use the low virus rates to tease back visitors to an economy flatlined by the collapse of tourism.

But all inbound flights will be stopped after the group of Egyptian soldiers entered via the military-controlled U-Tapao airport, in Rayong province, without any virus screening.

They were meant to self-quarantine at a hotel before flying out the next day but instead went to a nearby shopping mall. One soldier in the group later tested positive for the disease.

Authorities are now scrambling to trace around 1,700 people at the mall and the surrounding area.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha said he took “all respon-



The incidents drew widespread anger from Thais on social media, with the hashtag “damn the government, damn its supporters” trending on Twitter.

sibility” for the oversight and issued a rare apology for undermining the public’s “confidence and safety”.

“It happened because people did not respect the rules,” he said during a televised address.

“All inbound flights are halted -- there are no more approvals until we can solve the problem.”

Thailand, which receives daily repatriation flights, had imposed a 14-day state quarantine on a few approved groups of foreigners allowed in -- like spouses of Thai nationals, work permit holders and foreign students. But aircraft crew and diplomats were exceptions allowed to self-quarantine.

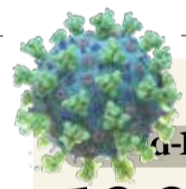
The Egyptian man arrived on a military flight with 30 other officers on July 10 after a 24-

hour round trip to Chengdu, China. They departed for Egypt the following morning.

After this incident, a health ministry official said that eight Egyptian military flights approved to travel through the kingdom later this month had been cancelled.

The Egyptian embassy issued a statement Tuesday night expressing “its most sincere regrets and sympathies to all those who may have been adversely affected by this unfortunate incident”.

Authorities are also trying to trace the movements of the daughter of Sudan’s charge d’affaires who entered the country on July 10 and stayed in a busy Bangkok condo instead of an embassy residence.



Global

COVID-19 Cases:

13,341,938

Deaths

577,963

Recovered:

7,788,610

New cases

+112,197

New deaths

+2,988

Middle East

Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	New deaths	Total Deaths
1 USA	3,508,103	+453	138,700
2 Brazil	1,895,555	+240	73,161
3 India	936,628	+588	24,315
4 Russia	739,947	+175	11,614
5 Peru	330,123		12,054
6 Chile	319,493	+45	7,069
7 Mexico	304,435	+485	35,491
8 Spain	303,699	+3	28,409
9 UK	291,373	+138	44,968
10 South Africa	287,796		4,172
11 Iran	262,173	+179	13,211
12 Pakistan	253,604	+54	5,320
13 Italy	243,344	+17	34,984
14 Saudi Arabia	237,803	+40	2,283

Figures as of closing

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases	Serious, Critical	Tot cases/1m pop
Egypt	83,001		3,935		24,975	54,091	41	811
Saudi Arabia	237,803	+2,692	2,283	+40	177,560	57,960	2,235	6,827
UAE	55,198		334		45,513	9,351	1	5,579
Kuwait	56,174	+666	396	+3	46,161	9,617	156	13,148
Oman	59,568	+1,389	273	+14	37,987	21,308	149	11,657
Qatar	104,533	+517	150	+1	101,160	3,223	137	37,229