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**NASA's Next Moon Mission Spacecraft Undergoing Critical Tests**

GREENBELT, Md. - NASA's next mission to Earth's closest astronomical body is in the midst of integration and testing at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md. The Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, known as LRO, will spend at least a year mapping the surface of the moon. Data from the orbiter will help NASA select safe landing sites for astronauts, identify lunar resources and study how the moon's environment will affect humans.

Engineers at Goddard are building the orbiter and rigorously testing spacecraft components to ready them for the harsh environment of space. After a component or entire subsystem is qualified, it is integrated into the LRO spacecraft. The core suite of avionics for the orbiter is assembled and undergoing system tests.

"This is a major milestone for the mission," said Craig Tooley, LRO project manager at Goddard. "Our team has been working nearly around the clock to get us to this point. Reaching this milestone keeps us on the path to sending LRO to the moon later this year."

Various components of the avionics and mechanical subsystem are in the process of going through their qualification program. Six instruments and one technology demonstration aboard the spacecraft will provide important data to enable a safe and productive human return to the moon. The six instruments are scheduled to arrive at Goddard in the coming months for integration.

The spacecraft will ship to NASA's Kennedy Space Center, Fla., in August in preparation for launch. The orbiter and the Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite will launch aboard an Atlas V rocket in late 2008. The trip to the moon will take approximately four days. The Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter initially will enter an elliptical orbit, also called the commissioning orbit. Once moved into its final orbit, a circular polar orbit approximately 31 miles above the moon, the spacecraft's instruments will map the lunar surface.

For more information about the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, visit:

<http://lro.gsfc.nasa.gov>

For more information about NASA's exploration program to the moon and beyond, visit:

<http://www.nasa.gov/exploration>

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