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TODAY'S NEWS: StarCraft II Will Arrive This Year If It Will Be Finished

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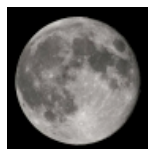
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NASA's Robots to Launch for the Moon
LRO/LCROSS blast off today

By Tudor Vieru, Science Editor
18th of June 2009, 14:20 GMT

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Later tonight, a large Atlas V delivery system is poised to lift the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) and the Lunar CRater Observation and Sensing Satellite (LCROSS) probes in lower Earth orbit, and then further into the Moon's. The two unmanned spacecraft are the first robotic probes to be sent forth to the natural satellite, to set the field for NASA's predicted return to the Moon in 2020. When Project Constellation will be completed, the American space agency will have at its disposal everything it needs to send humans on our closest neighbor again, including the data it will get from this mission.

The LRO/LCROSS launch was originally scheduled to take place yesterday, June 17th, but a glitch in space shuttle Endeavor's external hydrogen tank forced mission planners to move the launch of the orbiter from June 13th to June 17th. The two lunar probes were rescheduled, as NASA officials decided that it was more important to send the shuttle to the International Space Station. However, when another glitch was found in the same hydrogen tank early yesterday morning, Endeavor was grounded until July 11th at least, and the LRO/LCROSS flight got a green light.

"We're getting ready to take longer strides. To leave the shallows, once again, and step into deeper waters of what President Kennedy called the new ocean of space. The first island we plan to explore is the moon itself, our nearest neighbor," Space quotes NASA's Lunar Precursor Robotic Program Manager Todd May as saying. The lunar orbiter and the impactor will take off from the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, in Florida, and the Atlas V rocket carrying them will leave the ground at 5:12 pm EDT (2112 GMT). Originally, the flight was scheduled for October 2008, but countless problems and delays have constantly pushed its launch date back. NASA invested \$583 million in the project.

The LRO will be inserted in a stable lunar orbit at an altitude of about 31 miles (50 kilometers), and will use its seven onboard instruments to find a safe landing site for future landing missions, as well as to map as much of the natural satellite as possible. "Probably most important to all of us is to find safe landing sites, but we also need to find interesting landing sites," NASA's LRO Project Manager, Craig Tooley, added. The probe is fairly big, the space agency has revealed, comparable to a Mini Cooper.

TAGS: LRO | LCROSS | NASA | Moon | Endeavor

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