

Unique approach could aid in lunar base goal

Moon landing  
a ray of hope for  
future missions

◎Analysis

GABRIEL DOMINGUEZ

STAFF WRITER

Japan's successful touchdown on the lunar surface not only made it the fifth country to soft land a spacecraft on the moon but may have also demonstrated critical technologies for future space missions.

Dubbed "Moon Sniper," the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) spacecraft tested a new system that allows moon missions to land within 100 meters of a target area, a capability that — if confirmed over the coming weeks — would mark a major breakthrough in efforts to build an international lunar base camp and greatly advance other space exploration projects.

Designed to land "where we want to, rather than where it is easy to land," this pinpoint-landing technology "may be applied for a precision buildup of the Artemis base camp," Peter Garretson, a space strategy consultant and senior fellow in Defense Studies at the American Foreign Policy Council.

Artemis is a U.S.-led multinational program that aims to return astronauts to the moon as early as 2026 and establish a sustainable presence there to prepare missions to Mars and facilitate deep-space exploration.

But there is more.

With a budget of \$100 million, the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) mission also showed that it is possible to carry out such missions in a fuel-efficient and cost-effective way — an achievement that could set a new standard for future moonshots.

Following a four-month journey, the spacecraft touched down after midnight Saturday, with JAXA officials saying they have good reason to believe it achieved its goal of a high-precision landing at a crater slope, although this may take up to a month to verify.

Issues with the lander's solar panel, however, have threatened to cut short

other aspects of the mission, including the study of minerals and other elements on the moon's surface, although JAXA officials said Monday they were cautiously optimistic that they could eventually bring the lander back to life.

"According to the telemetry data, SLIM's solar cells are facing west," JAXA said in a statement. "So we believe there is a possibility of power generation if sunlight hits the moon from the west in the future, and we're now preparing for restoration."

The exact cause of the malfunction is still unclear, but Hitoshi Kuninaka, director-general of JAXA's Institute of Space and Astronautical Science, suggested that this could be due to the lander touching down at an angle where the solar panel is currently facing away from the sun.

Should this be the case, the setback may prove to be merely temporary.

"There is hope that as the moon orbits around the Earth, and the angle of the sun changes, that sunlight might fall upon the solar panels at some later date," said Garretson, noting that if the panel got enough sunlight, it may begin to recharge the batteries and revive the spacecraft.

In another positive development, JAXA also said Monday that the lander "was able to complete the transmission of technical and image data acquired during descent and on the lunar surface," confirming that "a lot of data" had been transmitted.

Getting the solar power cells to work is critical, as it would otherwise be impossible to transmit data back to Earth, a JAXA spokesperson told The Japan Times.

Seiji Sugita, a planetary scientist at the University of Tokyo, explained that because the solar panel is placed almost horizontally on the craft, even a small tilt after touchdown would prevent it from receiving sufficient sunlight, especially at this moment in time when the sun is shining at a low elevation.

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Israel said its troops had cleared much of northern Gaza of Hamas' military network, with more than 1 million residents of that enclave moving south to flee the bombardments. ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES / VIA REUTERS

Over 25,000 deaths reported in Gaza

178 killed in 24-hour  
period in one of war's  
deadliest days

NIDAL AL-MUGHRABI  
AND IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA

DOHA/GAZA CITY, GAZA STRIP

REUTERS

Israeli attacks and street battles raged across the Gaza Strip on Sunday as Palestinian health officials said the death toll from Israeli strikes since war broke out in October had passed 25,000.

Gaza's health ministry said 178 Palestinians had been killed in a 24-hour period, one of the deadliest days of the war so far. Israel's military said a soldier was killed while fighting.

Israeli forces and Hamas fighters clashed in several places, from Jabalia in the north to Khan Younis in the south, the focus of recent Israeli operations.

Israeli planes resumed heavy bombing on



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LDP CHIPS AWAY  
AT FACTIONS

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THE U.S. TEXTILE  
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SURVIVAL

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PM's faction  
gamble fails  
to improve  
popularity

ERIC JOHNSTON

STAFF WRITER

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's sudden announcement late last week of his plan to dissolve his political faction in order to restore public trust in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party — and his own administration — appears to be a gamble that has failed.

Leaders of three major LDP factions, including Kishida, announced last week that they would disband their groups over a political slush funds scandal, but on Monday polls showed public support for the prime minister and his party remained low.

A Yomiuri Shimbun poll conducted over the weekend found the Kishida Cabinet's approval rate was 24%, the lowest since the LDP returned to power in 2012. The poll also showed that 92% of respondents did not think the LDP's top leaders, including Kishida, had adequately explained the scandal to the public, including their own roles.

An Asahi Shimbun poll, also conducted Saturday and Sunday, showed that 72% of respondents did not believe that dissolving the factions would restore public trust, and gave a Cabinet support rate of 23%. A separate TV Asahi poll over the same period showed a Cabinet support rate of just 20.4%.

In addition to the Kishida faction, the one previously led by the late former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe — the party's largest faction — and the one under former LDP Secretary-General Toshihiro Nikai will also be dissolved.

However, three other factions have said they will remain intact, at least for now. They consist of the second-largest one under former Prime Minister Taro Aso, the third-largest one under LDP Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi, and one led by Hiroshi Moriyama, chief of the party's General Council. Aso reportedly defied pressure and conveyed his intention to Kishida to maintain his faction, saying his group's political funds have been properly managed.

Unlike the Kishida, Abe and Nikai factions, the three factions that have said they will remain are not the subject of prosecutors' investigations. Rather, the focus of the investigation has been the Abe faction.

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Schools start to reopen in Noto

Elementary and junior high facilities resume three weeks after quake | NATIONAL, PAGE 2

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How the DeSantis 2024 campaign unraveled

◎Focus

NANCY COOK, FELIPE MARQUES

AND ANNA KAISER

BLOOMBERG

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis entered the 2024 presidential race last May with swagger, high expectations and \$130 million in the bank under the direction of a top Republican strategist.

His was a campaign with so much promise. It began to fall apart weeks after it launched.

He exited the race on Sunday, less than a year later with cratering poll numbers, a team fractured by infighting and a laundry list of regrets.

The political world will study his campaign as an example of what not to do: Strategy miscalculations, financial mismanagement and a failure to fashion a likable candidate plagued the campaign. Still, those mistakes were secondary to the original misjudgment that Republican voters would prefer a knock-off in place of the real thing.

"We learned in 2016 that the voters did want Trump, so trying to run a campaign that



Florida Gov. Ron  
DeSantis was  
primed to be the  
main Republican  
alternative to  
Donald Trump.

JORDAN GALE / THE  
NEW YORK TIMES

got to his right on culture issues without really criticizing him was going to fail because it had already failed," said Tim Miller, who worked on Jeb Bush's presidential race in 2016.

The DeSantis team is recounting their lessons learned. They wish they'd entered the race sooner and spent more time talking about the economy, rather than Florida, according to people familiar with the strategy. Privately, allies say they wished he was

more comfortable with voters.

DeSantis waited six months after former President Donald Trump announced to jump into the Republican primary himself. He instead focused on a conservative agenda in Florida, fueled by a resounding win in 2022 for a second gubernatorial term.

The lag time gave Trump the ability to define him, giving him nicknames like "DeSantimonious" and "Tiny D." He was never able to recover from the barrage of attacks.

It wasn't supposed to unfold this way. DeSantis was primed to be the main Republican alternative to Trump.

Titans of finance, including Ken Griffin and Thomas Peterffy, bankrolled his gubernatorial run, which raised more than \$200 million from some of the country's richest families. Wealthy donors shelled out \$1 million each for his black-tie inauguration gala that included a candle-lit dinner catered by the upscale restaurant Carbone.

Shortly after, he privately identified campaign aides and held conversations with Jeff Roe, a Republican strategist who would lead

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