Russia Launches Mars Moon Probe

Curious Cat Science and Engineering Blog

Russians launch Mars moon probe [1]
Russia has launched an audacious bid to scoop up rock and dust samples from the Martian moon Phobos and bring them back to Earth for study.
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Moscow has despatched a total of 16 missions to the Red Planet since the 1960s. None has successfully completed its goals, with the most recent endeavour – the sophisticated Mars-96 spacecraft – being destroyed in a failed launch.
…
Once on the surface, a robotic arm will pick up samples of the regolith ("soil"). Some of this material will be analysed there and then, but a portion of it – about 200g – will be transferred to a canister for return to Earth.
This canister and its departure stage should be sent home within a few days of Phobos-Grunt's arrival on the moon. All being well, the canister should fall to Earth in the Kazakh desert in August 2014.

Potato-shaped Phobos is a fascinating target. Although it has been studied extensively by passing satellites, it still holds many secrets – not just about itself, but also the planet below.

The mission also is carrying a Chinese satellite that will be launched into orbit around Mars. This mission shows the future of space exploration. The USA continues to reduce the funding for space exploration while countries such as China are greatly increasing their funding.

I expect the leading space exploration will become much more global and the USA will take a less prominent role as the USA decides to spend funds elsewhere instead of scientific missions in space. Politicians in the USA have also stopped NASA from collaborating internationally which further reduces the USA role in the future of scientific research in space.

Russia seems to be making a new push to invest in space after a period of reduced funding. Russia's economy still has many weaknesses, but in the last decade the oil wealth has provided some wealth and Russia is interested in using some of those funds for space exploration.

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