

Japan's moon probe landed upside-down but somehow it still works

Japan's moon probe landed upside-down but somehow it still works



Japan's first moon landing is full of surprises, now including coming back to life. The Smart Lander for Investigating Moon — aka the SLIM probe — landed on the moon with astonishing accuracy on January 19.

Even though one of its two main thrusters failed, causing the spacecraft to tumble as it descended, SLIM still landed within 180 feet of its target spot on the edge of the moon's Shioli crater.

The touchdown was so precise that officials at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) have nicknamed the probe their "moon sniper."

There was one big problem, though: The robot landed upside-down. That angled its solar panels away from the sun, preventing it from generating energy. Within a few hours after its historic landing, the spacecraft dropped out of communications with Earth.

But before that, it was able to deploy two tiny rovers, one of which snapped a photo of SLIM belly-up on the moon.

Miraculously, though, SLIM came back to life this weekend.

"Communication with SLIM was successfully established last night, and operations resumed!" the JAXA SLIM team posted.

Reuters reported that this was likely because the sunlight had changed direction.

JAXA said it had "immediately" started science operations with SLIM, imaging rocks in the area.

Perhaps JAXA's biggest goal for this mission was to test its precision-landing technologies, which will be needed as nations flock to the cratered south pole and far side of the moon, where critical resources such as water could be mined.

"We demonstrated that we can land where we want," JAXA project manager Shinichiro Sakai told the Associated Press. "We opened a door to a new era."

So far this century, China, India, and now Japan have all landed on the moon. Both the US and Russia have tried and failed.

The US and the Soviet Union each landed on the moon several times in the 20th century.

Sakai added that he would give SLIM's pinpoint landing a "perfect score."