

Probe Sent to Mars Moon Appears to Be Lost

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The  **Moscow Times**

Hope faded over the weekend that Russian space engineers would be able to fix the Fobos-Grunt probe bound for a moon of Mars but stuck in Earth's orbit.

The Fobos-Grunt, or Phobos-Ground, was launched Wednesday and reached preliminary orbit, but its engines never fired to send it off to the Red Planet. The unmanned probe will come crashing down in a couple of weeks if engineers fail to fix the problem, which some experts say is highly possible.

"The station can be considered lost," an unidentified space industry official told Interfax on Saturday.

✘Itar-Tass reported Sunday that efforts to communicate with the spacecraft have failed. U.S. and European space engineers also were attempting to retrieve data from the probe as it passed over their territory, it said.✘

A satellite tracking web site showed the probe steadily losing altitude as it passed over Asia

on Sunday.

The toxic and heavy 14-ton probe might reach Earth in two or three weeks, but it is hard to forecast the date and crash zone, Interfax reported.

A special commission will be formed to investigate the failure, Interfax reported.

Given that the launch was Russia's first attempt to return to deep space after a 14-year lull and was preceded by a series of setbacks in the industry, its failure is especially embarrassing for a country that marked the 50th anniversary of Yury Gagarin's first space flight this year.

(AP, MT)

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