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Space Station Computer Outage Demands Spacewalk

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CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida — NASA has ordered a spacewalk to repair a serious computer outage at the International Space Station.

A backup computer for some robotic systems failed Friday. The main computer is fine and the six-man crew of three Russians, two Americans and one Japanese is safe, but the malfunction puts next week's supply run in jeopardy.

Mission managers agreed Saturday that a spacewalk is needed to replace the bad computer. But officials want one more day before deciding whether the situation is safe enough in orbit to proceed with Monday's SpaceX launch as planned.

NASA had promised to decide Sunday whether to delay the delivery mission.

No date for the spacewalk has been set yet; officials indicated it could occur sometime in the next week or so. The job is among those practiced by the astronauts before flight.

The SpaceX Dragon capsule holds more than 2 tons of station supplies and science experiments and is awaiting launch at Cape Canaveral. The shipment is already a month late for unrelated reasons.

If the Dragon soars Monday — launch time is scheduled for 8:58 p.m. GMT — then it would reach the orbiting lab on Wednesday.

Flight controllers want to make sure enough redundancy exists at the space station before committing to the launch.

The bad computer, called an MDM or multiplexer-demultiplexer, is among more than a dozen located on the outside of the space station, used to route commands to various systems.

Officials said the failure has had no impact on the scientific and other work being conducted by the astronauts.

NASA is paying the California-based SpaceX as well as Orbital Sciences Corp. of Virginia to deliver space station goods. Russia, Europe and Japan also perform occasional shipments. The U.S. space shuttles carried up the bulk of station equipment until their retirement in 2011.

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