

Kyodo: Prospects Dim for Japanese Asteroid Probe's Return Home

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Tokyo, Nov. 9 Kyodo -- Prospects of return to Earth have become dim for the Japanese asteroid explorer Hayabusa as all but one engine has stopped, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency said Monday.

JAXA pins its remaining hopes on the possibility that the probe, which aims to return home in June 2010, may have collected some dust particles thrown up when the probe touched down on Itokawa in 2005.

Hayabusa, launched by an M-5 rocket in 2003, succeeded in landing on Itokawa in 2005 but is believed to have failed in its attempt to take samples from the asteroid.

Of Hayabusa's four ion engines, **only one is currently operational as the third engine was found on Wednesday to have stopped** following the two previously stopped, according to JAXA.

Hayabusa is currently flying in space some 160 million kilometers from Earth.