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SPACE

ISS crew to plant Thai trees

POST REPORTERS

Three hundred and seventy *Ratchapreuk* tree seeds will soon be planted onboard the International Space Station (ISS) after they were sent into space with the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket yesterday morning.

The rocket was launched from the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral in Florida at 7.27am local time along with four astronauts.

It was Nasa's first full-fledged mission to send a crew into orbit onboard a privately owned spacecraft.

Ratchapreuk, or *Cassia Fistula Linn* (Golden Shower), is Thailand's national tree.

The seeds will be cultivated for four months on board the ISS, according to the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA). Basil will also be cultivated, it said.

The operation was made possible through cooperation with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (Jaxa), which is one of five participating space agencies in the International Space Station programme.

The ISS contains facilities that provide space for environmental research. Scientists are testing spacecraft systems to eventually conduct long-term missions on the moon and Mars in the future.

Jaxa will lead a farming programme onboard the ISS called Asian Herbs in Space (AHIS).

The AHIS aims to observe farming in a no-gravity environment. After four months, the seeds will be returned to Thailand, NSTDA said in a press release.

The NSTDA also launched a parallel farming project involving high school students planting Golden Shower seeds at the same time as the ones onboard the ISS.