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Space Agency Plans Moon Mission in 2015

By The Moscow Times

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The Federal Space Agency says it will send an unmanned spacecraft to the moon in 2015 from a new cosmodrome in the country's Far East.

Roskosmos head Vladimir Popovkin told Interfax on Tuesday that a rocket booster would deliver a 500-kilogram space exploration vehicle to the moon with up to 25 kilograms of scientific equipment that would search for water and take soil samples.

News reports said earlier that a Soyuz-2 rocket would be used for the unmanned mission.

Popovkin said Tuesday that the Luna-Glob-1 spacecraft would be launched from Russia's new Vostochny Cosmodrome in the Amur region.

In December, Gennady Raikunov, director of the Central Scientific Research Institute of Machine Building, told Interfax that the construction of two launch pads for Soyuz-2

rockets was proceeding at full tilt at the Vostochny Cosmodrome.

The launch pads are due to be completed before 2015. Raikunov described funding for the construction work as "completely adequate."

In total, President Vladimir Putin has vowed to invest $1 billion in building the cosmodrome not far from the Chinese border. At present, Moscow leases the Baikonur Cosmodrome from former Soviet partner Kazakhstan for its space missions.

Russia's last unmanned moon mission successfully collected 170 grams of lunar samples in 1976.

(AP, MT)

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