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Progress Being Made On Space Launch Pad

By Rachel Nielsen

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A plaque at the Vostochny facility.

The government will complete infrastructure construction this year for the Vostochny space launch facility, an alternative to Kazakhstan's Baikonur Cosmodrome, a top official said.

Roads and rail links, as well as an administrative building, will be built there, said Grigory Naginsky, director of the Federal Special Construction Agency.

The agency also has begun work on the launch facility and assembly and testing facility, Naginsky said in comments carried by Interfax last week.

He said his construction team was outpacing the planning team.

"The only thing is that our building capabilities are getting ahead of the project designers' capabilities," Naginsky said at a news conference. "We would be able to work faster if they handed over the project documentation faster."

The Vostochny Cosmodrome is being built in the Far East Federal District's Amur region, an area that borders China and is relatively close to the Pacific Ocean.

Creating its own fully capable cosmodrome would free Russia from its reliance on Baikonur in Kazakhstan, a compelling reason to build the Vostochny spaceport, said Igor Marinin, editor-in-chief of aerospace magazine Novosti Kosmonavtiki.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Moscow lost control over the major rocket and spaceship base. Today, Russia pays $115 million per year to rent the Baikonur facility.

Kazakh authorities can determine how many launches the Russians can make, Marinin said in an interview.

Russian space officials had sought to make 17 launches this year, but Kazakh authorities are allowing only 12, citing possible environmental damage from rocket fuel.

Marinin, an academic with the Tsiolkovsky Russian Academy of Cosmonautics, called the Kazakh reasons for denying the launches invalid and said the situation was "unacceptable."

Behind the Vostochny Cosmodrome is the state's "desire to have independent access to space that isn't tied to another government," he said.

The inaugural launch from Vostochny is scheduled to occur in 2015, when a Soyuz-2 rocket will be sent into space.

That is a versatile type of rocket, though it is not used to carry people, Marinin said.

A 2009 decree by then-President Dmitry Medvedev named the Federal Special Construction Agency as the lone "executive contractor" for the new space center, the agency says on its website.

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