The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Baikonur Launch Plan Finalized

By Anatoly Medetsky

March 31, 2013



Russia and Kazakhstan have had a major dispute over the use of Baikonur. **Scott Andrews**

Russia and Kazakhstan appear to have put to rest their differences over the number of launches to be allowed from Baikonur spaceport, following weeks of talks.

But officials from both countries did not reveal how many Russian rockets will blast off this year from the launch facility in the steppe.

"We have no disagreements about permits for launches," First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov said, Interfax reported. "We have a fully agreed schedule of launches for 2013."

He made the statement at a news conference after the latest round of negotiations at Baikonur late last week.

His counterpart, Kazakh Deputy Prime Minister Kairat Kelimbetov, confirmed at the news conference that the countries had reached a deal. "We believe that all working issues have been resolved," he said.

Kazakhstan in January said it would allow 14 launch attempts by Proton-M rockets this year, down from 17 that Russia had sought.

Representatives of the Federal Space Agency, Kazakhstan Space Agency and a spokesman for Shuvalov all said Friday that they were unaware exactly how many launches the deal envisaged.

Kazakhstan has insisted that Russia improve the safety of the rocket, which uses highly toxic fuel.

Hours after the Baikonur talks concluded, U.S.- and Luxembourg-based satellite services provider Intelsat said it signed a firm contract for two Proton missions from the cosmodrome. International Launch Services, majority-owned by Proton manufacturer Khrunichev, will conduct the launches.

Representatives of both companies said they could not reveal what year the missions would take place.

"We are pleased to have Intelsat's confidence," International Launch Services president Phil Slack said in a statement about the contract.

One of 11 Proton-M commercial launches failed last year, causing the loss of two communication satellites in August.

In other aerospace news from Baikonur, Russian spaceship maker Energia said it was moving ahead with efforts to build a next-generation space shuttle. Experts could in the next few months approve its technical concept, opening the way for designing and producing a first trial model, said Vitaly Lopota, the company's chief designer.

The new spacecraft aims to have the capacity to carry four people into orbit, instead of the three people that single-use Soyuz workhorses can now lift. The future craft will use the Vostochny Cosmodrome, which is currently under construction, as its launch base.

Contact the author at medetsky@imedia.ru

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/03/31/baikonur-launch-plan-finalized-a22799