The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Rogozin Rebukes Investigators Over Rocket Sabotage Statement

By Matthew Bodner

May 29, 2014

A Russian Proton-M rocket being readied for launch by engineers at the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

Special report for MT

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin on Thursday scolded an interagency commission tasked with investigating the recent malfunction of a rocket for citing sabotage as a possible cause of the crash.

The Russian Proton-M rocket took off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan two weeks ago carrying an advanced communications satellite, but ground control lost contact with it after nine minutes and its fuel and component parts burned up in the atmosphere.

The failure, Russia's fifth since 2010, was put down to a malfunction in a steering engine, and the commission is analyzing all possible causes, including skullduggery.

"The [possibility] of sabotage has not been ruled out." Alexander Danilyuk, head of the commission, said in a statement released Thursday by the Federal Space Agency, or Roscosmos.

Rogozin, who oversees the space and defense industries, and is never one to shy away from inflammatory remarks, ripped into Roscosmos' statement via social media.

The "accident commission should first finish its work and present its results to the Russian government, and then torment society with subsequent versions of the incident," Rogozin wrote on Twitter.

Roscosmos said in a second statement Thursday that looking into the possibility of sabotage is standard procedure for any accident investigation and that the commission has not uncovered any evidence to support suspicions of foul play.

Based on the commission's findings, Roscosmos is preparing a report into the crash that will be submitted to the government. Roscosmos did not say when the report would be ready.

This is not the first time that Russian space officials have raised the specter of sabotage after high-level and embarrassing rocket failures put the industry under scrutiny.

In 2012, former Roscosmos chief Vladimir Popovkin suggested that several rocket failures since 2010, including that of the Phobos-Grunt probe, destined for one of the Martian moons, had been caused by foreign saboteurs, though no concrete evidence supporting his claims ever came to light.

Contact the author at bizreporter@imedia.ru

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