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Launch of Angara Rocket Postponed Indefinitely

By The Moscow Times

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Soldier guarding Angara during its rollout to the launch pad at Plesetsk on Wednesday.

Russian space officials have not yet identified the cause of Friday's last-minute postponement of the Angara rocket launch, and won't set a new launch date until the vehicle has been fixed, a space industry spokesperson said.

The rocket's flight computer automatically canceled the launch just 15 seconds before liftoff on Friday.

A spokesman from the Khrunichev Space Center, the prime contractor for the Angara rocket program, said that the State Commission — a body of officials that gives the final authorization for all major Russian space activities — will meet in the near future to look into the rocket's aborted launch, Interfax reported Monday.

The spokesman added that engineers are now checking a problem with the first stage

propulsion system.

Earlier on Monday, RIA Novosti cited an unidentified Russian space industry source as saying that Angara's flight computer detected a leak in an oxidizer valve — a critical element in the rocket's propulsion system.

The Russian media were set to make an impressive show of Angara's launch on Friday, as the rocket's fate will act as a litmus test of Russia's post-Soviet space capabilities. The beleaguered space program has survived for the past 20 years by modernizing tried-and-true Soviet-era designs.

Media reports in the wake of Friday's failure suggested that there would be a second attempt on Saturday, but that launch window came and went, accompanied by even more silence from space officials.

An unidentified source told RIA Novosti that the rocket was being taken off of the launch pad that day for further investigation.

Later on Monday, Interfax cited another anonymous source as saying that the Angara rocket remained on the launch pad, contradicting previous reports that it had, in fact, been rolled back to the vehicle assembly building at the Plesetsk Cosmodrome.

“The State Commission on June 27 decided to leave the rocket on the pad and drain the fuel. Currently, we are continuing the examination of all systems. Specialists hope that the launch may take place in the coming days,” the space industry source said.

Although new rockets tend to be beset with difficulties during their first launches, Khrunichev's ability to build reliable rockets has been questioned frequently amid a series of embarrassing failures suffered by the normally-dependable Proton rocket since 2010. Recently, a Roscosmos deputy described the situation at the Khrunichev as "a serious systemic crisis."

Read more about Angara and Russian space industry reform:

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