

Space Agency Wants \$6 Billion to Get Russian Boots on the Moon by 2030

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Forty-five years after the Soviet Union lost the race to the Moon, Russia's Federal Space Agency, Roscosmos, wants to revive its plan to put Russian boots on the lunar surface — a mission for which it says it needs almost 230 billion rubles (\$6.3 billion) through 2025, Interfax reported Friday.

Russia's current national space agenda envisions cosmonauts walking on the lunar surface by 2030, but the intention is more symbolic than genuine, as it allocates no money to realizing the idea.

Now, the agency plans to spend 152 billion rubles (\$4.2 billion) on the construction of launch facilities for a new super-heavy rocket at the Vostochny Cosmodrome, currently under construction in the Far East, Interfax said, citing a leaked Roscosmos strategy document currently being considered by the government. The rocket is slated to launch sometime after 2025.

An additional 60 billion (\$1.6 billion) will go to begin developing and testing components for the rocket, which will be capable of delivering a spacecraft weighing 80 tons to low Earth orbit. The rocket would have an upper stage – the part of the rocket that pushes the ship to the Moon – capable of delivering a 20 ton spaceship into lunar orbit.

The last rocket to lift such a tonnage was the Saturn V rocket, built by NASA in the 1960s to land astronauts on the Moon as part of the Apollo program. Still the most powerful rocket ever built, the Saturn V could lift 130 tons to orbit.

This will be Russia's third attempt at building a large, heavy-lifting rocket. In the 1960s, the Soviets developed the massive N-1 rocket to rival the Saturn V in the race to the Moon. But after exploding four consecutive times, the N-1 project was cancelled. Another Soviet heavy rocket was developed in the late 1980s, the Energia booster, but the project was dropped after the collapse of communism for lack of funds.

The long dearth of funding took its toll on the space sector. To remedy this, Roscosmos wants to spend 14 billion rubles refurbishing industrial centers that have decayed since the fall of the Soviet Union to ensure that Russia has the manufacturing capability to construct a heavy rocket once it has been developed.

Russia is tilting not only at landing on the Moon, but staying there. The strategy document also proposes spending 2 billion rubles (\$55 million) to develop a technical proposal for a manned lunar base by 2022, with preliminary designs stages being completed no later than 2024, Interfax said.

The Soviet Union's old rival NASA is currently building a brand-new heavy rocket to send men on missions to asteroids and Mars. The project, known as SLS, was initially estimated to cost \$15 billion, but critics have said the actual cost will be much higher.

See also:

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