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Russia to Launch New Heavy-Lift Angara Rocket in December

By The Moscow Times

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Having managed to launch its first rocket of post-Soviet design in July, Russia is now getting ready to test a beefed-up version of the vehicle by the end of the year, thereby highlighting the Russian space industry's position as a major global player.

Preparations for the launch, which is scheduled for the end of December, are already under way at the Plesetsk Cosmodrome near Arkhangelsk, the head of Russia's air and space defense forces, Lieutenant General Alexander Golovko, was quoted as saying Wednesday by Interfax.

Called Angara, the new rocket was commissioned in the early 1990s, when Russian space officials were concerned that an independent Ukraine might withhold deliveries of vital components used in the construction of Russian rockets like the Proton.

The Angara rocket launched successfully on July 9, nearly two weeks after the cancellation of the first attempt, which was derailed by a leaky pressure valve.

The rocket's design means that it can be attached to the side of its core booster, which allows the vehicle's lifting capacity to be tailored to the weight of its payload.

In this way, the Angara rocket follows the economical approach to rocket design currently employed by U.S-based commercial launch company SpaceX, which is developing a heavy launch vehicle based on its already proven Falcon-9 rocket. The two vehicles will compete on the global commercial launch market.

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