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Russian Space Company to Build Spaceship for Flights to Moon

By The Moscow Times

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Russia's premier developer of manned spacecraft, Energia, plans to create a spacecraft to send cosmonauts to the moon and back, the Interfax news agency reported on Wednesday, citing a senior company official.

"The main task of the new spaceship is to deliver its crew into a high orbit around the moon, and then bring them back," Energia's Deputy General Designer, Nikolai Brukhanov, was quoted by Interfax as saying at a conference in Moscow.

If carried through to completion, the new spacecraft will travel farther than any manned spacecraft ever designed by the Russian space industry. Soviet plans to match the United States by landing on the moon in the 1970s were dashed by rocket failure and the program was canceled.

But Brukhanov's description of the new vehicle indicates that it is not capable of landing

on the moon, only circling around it. To land on the moon, Russia will need to send a special landing vehicle on the trip — and this will add a significant amount of weight.

More weight would a bigger rocket to launch it all at once, and Russia does not currently have a rocket that can lift more than 30 tons.

Brukhanov did not discount that Russia might use a multiple launch strategy — in which a moon lander would be launched separately and linked up to a moon vehicle once already in space.

NASA's Saturn V rocket, the behemoth that took U.S. astronauts to the moon in the late 1960s and early 1970s, had a launch capacity of about 130 tons.

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