The Moscow Times
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Russia to Finish Repairs on Grounded ISS Module Next Year

By The Moscow Times

February 25, 2015



Russia will finally complete the construction of a long-delayed addition to its segment of the International Space Station (ISS) next year, the head of the company building the module said, the RIA Novosti news agency reported Wednesday.

"The module's retrofit is scheduled to be completed by February 2016," said Andrei Kalinovsky, head of the Khrunichev space corporation that built the space station module, known as the Nauka Multipurpose Laboratory Module.

"Later, the module will be transferred to RSC Energia for a final shakedown, after which it will be possible to launch [Nauka] and add it to the ISS," Kalinovsky said.

A significant contribution to the $150 billion ISS, Nauka — Russian for science — was originally slated for launch in 2007, but a series of setbacks pushed the date back to 2014.

While engineers at RSC Energia, the space corporation responsible for all of Russia's manned spaceflight vehicles, were inspecting Khrunichev's work early last year, they discovered debris in the module's engines, news agency Interfax reported in May.

These engines are an important component, helping to reboost the space station's orbit as it slowly degrades over time. A full rework of the propulsion system was required, a process that officials at the time said would probably push the launch back to 2017.

The module includes a propulsion system to help control the orientation of the station, provide additional storage space and fuel tanks and would add extra parking space for the Soyuz and Progress spacecraft that routinely ferry crews and cargo to the orbiting outpost.

The ongoing struggle to launch Nauka has hampered Russia's plans to expand its segment of the ISS, since the module also includes ports to attach future Russian modules.

It has also forced the European Space Agency to wait 10 years to launch a major contribution to the ISS — the European Robotic Arm, which is designed to be mounted outside of Nauka.

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