The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Economic Crisis Guts Russia's Space Budget

By The Moscow Times

April 15, 2015



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Russia's Federal Space Agency has reduced its upcoming funding request by 41 percent to 2 trillion rubles ($40 billion) over the next decade, according to a statement published on the Roscosmos website Wednesday.

"It should be noted that the designated volume of federal funds is the absolute minimum for guaranteeing that we achieve [our] established objectives," said the chairman of Roscosmos's internal planning body, Yury Koptev.

Just three weeks ago, Koptev quoted 3.4 trillion rubles ($67.5 billion) as the agency's funding target in its proposed Federal Space Program 2016-2025 — a document that lays out Russia's space activities over the next decade and specifies the funding allocated to each project.

The original draft of the program was completed last year, but Russia's economic crisis has

forced the government to reevaluate its spending priorities. Russia's economy is expected to shrink by up to 5 percent this year amid low oil prices and Western sanctions over Moscow's role in the Ukraine crisis.

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Although the agency continues to say it will land a cosmonaut on the moon by 2030, it will need to build a new super-heavy rocket to accomplish the task. It is now unclear where the money to develop such a rocket will come from.

Koptev in March said a new moon rocket would cost 700 billion rubles ($13.4 billion), but on Monday Roscosmos chief Igor Komarov told President Vladimir Putin that the new proposal allocated only 60 billion rubles ($1.2 billion) for the project.

NASA is working on a super-heavy rocket of its own, the Space Launch System, which is set to fly in 2017. NASA estimates the final development costs for the new rocket will be around $12 billion.

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