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Kazakhstan's Third-Ever Cosmonaut to Replace Pop Star Brightman on ISS Mission

By The Moscow Times

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Kazakhstan's third ever cosmonaut is set to replace would-be space tourist Sarah Brightman, a British singer who recently backed out of a $52 million seat aboard a Russian Soyuz spacecraft blasting off in September.

Russian federal space agency Roscosmos confirmed on its official Twitter account Monday that Kazakh cosmonaut candidate Aidyn Aimbetov would be the third man on the short 10-day flight to the International Space Station.

Brightman backed out of the space mission last month, citing family issues. Though the cost of her Soyuz seat has not been disclosed officially, it has been reported as costing around $52 million. U.S. space agency NASA pays Roscosmos around $72 million per seat aboard Soyuz spaceships.

Aimbetov will become only the third Kazakh to ever go to space, despite the fact that his country hosts the Soviet-built Baikonur Cosmodrome — the launch site of Yury Gagarin and today the world's busiest spaceport.

Roscosmos today leases from the Kazakh government for $115 million annually.

The first Kazakh cosmonaut, Toktar Aubakirov, flew in October 1991. The second, Talgat Musabayev, flew three times — first in 1994, then 1998 and in 2001. Musabayev is now the head of the Kazakh space agency, Kazcosmos.

Aimbetov's journey to space began in 2003, when the Kazakh government began grooming him and another homegrown hopeful for a mission to the ISS. In 2007, the two were sent to Russia for training under Roscosmos' tutelage, but funding cuts at Kazcosmos grounded them in 2009.

Roscosmos still has to go through the formalities of officially accepting Aimbetov as a member of the September crew.

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