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Russia Plans First Rocket Launch From Vostochny Cosmodrome

By The Moscow Times

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The first launch from Russia's Vostochny Cosmodrome, in the country's Far East, will be held at 5:01 a.m. on Wednesday, April 27, the TASS news agency reported Monday, citing the Russian space agency Roscosmos.

The space agency said that final preparations for the launch of Soyuz 2.1a carrier rocket, expected to deliver three satellites into orbit, are underway.

In a statement published Saturday, Roscosmos said the Soyuz carrier rocket had been successfully installed at the launch site on April 23.

Construction of the Vostochny Cosmodrome began in 2011 and is expected to be completed in 2018 after a series of delays. In October 2015, President Vladimir Putin postponed the initial launch from the cosmodrome, originally scheduled for December, by four months.

The $3 billion cosmodrome, one of Russia's most ambitious and high-profile projects, has

been marred by corruption scandals and worker strikes with several construction bosses arrested for embezzling state funds. Russian news agency Interfax reported in April that 21 criminal cases in relation to the construction of the Vostochny Cosmodrome have been opened so far.

Russian officials hope that the spaceport will help reduce the country's dependency on the Soviet-built Baikonur Cosmodrome — which is on lease to Russia from Kazakhstan until 2050 — and that Vostochny will eventually become Russia's main space launch facility.

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