The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Roscosmos Chief Pokes Russian Billionaires After Branson Space Flight

July 12, 2021



Richard Branson and five Virgin Galactic employees breached the U.S.-recognized boundary of space Sunday. **Johannes Eisele / AFP**

Russia's space chief Dmitry Rogozin has pressed his country's oligarchs to take a page from their Western counterparts and invest into space after British billionaire Richard Branson's journey to the frontier of space.

Branson and five Virgin Galactic employees breached the U.S.-recognized boundary of space Sunday and experienced a few minutes of weightlessness at an altitude of 86 kilometers aboard the VSS Unity. The mission gave Branson, 70, a one-up over fellow tycoon Jeff Bezos, whose Blue Origin is set to launch him into space on July 20.

Related article: Russia Races Tom Cruise and Musk for First Movie in Space

"I hope that one day our billionaire oligarchs will start spending their money not on regular yachts and vanity fairs, but on the development of space technologies and knowledge about

space," Rogozin tweeted.

Russia's space sector has been beset with corruption in recent years, including multibillion-dollar embezzlement scandals over the construction of the new Vostochny launchpad in the Far East.

Russia is also a player in the lucrative space tourism sector, having sent eight tourists to the International Space Station (ISS) on its rockets in the 2000s.

Rogozin's Roscosmos space agency has announced that it will send Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa and film producer Yozo Hirano to the ISS aboard a Russian spacecraft on Dec. 8. Separately, Roscosmos says it will send an actress and a director to the ISS in October to shoot a feature film co-produced by Rogozin that hopes to rival NASA's partnership with Hollywood star Tom Cruise.

In praising Branson, Rogozin also pointed out that the billionaire and his crew did not exceed the internationally recognized frontier of space known as the Karman line.

"We can agree with a number of experts' statements that the suborbital flight has nothing to do with professional space flight, but nevertheless it's a landmark event in terms of the development of technologies and the expansion of humanity's opportunities to see our planet from space."

AFP contributed reporting.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/07/12/roscosmos-chief-pokes-russian-billionaires-after-branson-space-flight-a74488