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Kazakhstan Denies Russia Plans Early Exit From Baikonur Spaceport

By AFP

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Baikonur Cosmodrome. **Ninara (CC BY 2.0)**

Kazakhstan on Thursday denied reports that Russia plans to abandon its lease on the Baikonur Cosmodrome before it expires in 2050, amid speculation that Moscow may be preparing to ditch the historic launch site.

Local media in Kazakhstan have reported that Russia could exit the lease between 2026 and 2028 as it pulls back from international space cooperation, including a planned withdrawal from the International Space Station (ISS) as early as 2028.

“The question of early termination of the lease, or transfer of the city of Baikonur to the full control of the Kazakh side, is not being considered at this time,” Kazakhstan’s Aerospace Committee told AFP.

Russia pays Kazakhstan $115 million annually to lease Baikonur, which it has used since the

Soviet era to launch astronauts to the ISS, one of the last remaining areas of collaboration between Russia and the West.

The Soviet-built facility, located in southern Kazakhstan, played a central role in Cold War space milestones, including the launches of Yuri Gagarin, the first human in space, in 1961, and Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, in 1963.

Moscow has not publicly commented on any plans to withdraw, but has ramped up development of alternative domestic launch sites, including the newer Vostochny Cosmodrome in the Far East.

A modernization effort launched in 2004 to update Baikonur has faced delays due to chronic underfunding and geopolitical uncertainty following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

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