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Roscosmos Finishes Repairs to Damaged Baikonur Launchpad

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The Baikonur launchpad. **vk.com/roscosmos**

Russia's space agency Roscosmos said Tuesday that it completed repairs to its launchpad at the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, three months after the site was damaged during a rocket launch.

The launchpad's service cabin, a movable structure that provides engineers access to a rocket's lower sections, was damaged on Nov. 27 during a crewed Soyuz launch to the International Space Station.

At the time, experts expressed concern about potential disruptions to Russia's crewed spaceflight schedule as Roscosmos said repairs could last several months.

After confirming that repair work was complete on Tuesday, Roscosmos said it plans to launch the Progress MC-33 cargo spacecraft aboard a Soyuz rocket on March 22 to resupply the ISS.

Related article: Baikonur Launchpad Damaged After Rocket Launch to ISS

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 few 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.

Separately, Roscosmos announced an open contest for Russians to join its cosmonaut corps, which currently has 27 members. Applicants must be 35 years old, hold a university degree in a science field or medicine and have at least three years of professional experience.

Oleg Kononenko, who heads the cosmonaut training center, said Wednesday that between four and six candidates would be selected. Their names will be announced on Nov. 10.

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