

First Brazilian Astronaut To Join Russian Space Mission

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The first Brazilian astronaut will go on a mission aboard the Russian Soyuz spacecraft next spring, a Russian space official said Friday, RIA Novosti has reported.

Viktor Remishevsky, vice president of Russia's Federal Space Agency, said Russia and Brazil had signed an agreement to send Lieutenant Colonel Marcos Pontes to the International Space Station (ISS) in March or April 2006.

Remishevsky said the contract's value, which could not be disclosed, was acceptable to the space agencies of both countries, but had yet to be approved by the Brazilian parliament, reported RIA Novosti.

In order to go to the ISS next spring, Pontes needs to arrive in Russia for training before September 15. He will be taught to use Soyuz's operational and life-support equipment at Stellar City, outside Moscow.

Brazilian Space Agency President Sergio Gaudenci said the nation was very excited to see Pontes go into space in 2006, as that year would mark the 100th anniversary of fellow countryman Alberto Santos-Dumont's pioneer heavier-than-air powered flight.

Pontes, a member of the Brazilian Air Force, has been training at the NASA Space Center in Houston, Texas, since 1998.

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