

ISS To Evolve Into International Space Port - Official

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Image: ISS Progress 20 docks with the International Space Station. Credit: NASA TV

The number of pressurized modules on the International Space Station will be doubled to 12 in 2010, the head of Russia's leading space corporation said Wednesday, reports RIA Novosti.

Nikolai Sevastyanov, the head and chief designer of Energia, said ISS crews would be doubled to six members in 2007, and four Soyuz spacecraft and two Progress cargo ships would be launched to the station in the same year.

Sevastyanov also highlighted moves to ensure that the international community played a greater role in servicing and using the station.

"The launch of Europe's ATV [Automated Transfer Vehicle] has been scheduled for late 2007," he said, adding that Russia had been involved in the project.

The ATV is designed partially as a replacement for Russia's Progress spacecraft, although at nine metric tons it will have three times its capacity. Like the Progress it will deliver liquids and relatively fragile cargoes. Likewise, the ATV will also serve as a container for the station's waste.

The spaceship will also be used to correct the orbital station's trajectory if needed.

In addition, Japan, which has been participating in the ISS program since its early stage, intends to launch the H-II Transfer Vehicle (HTV) in 2009. The spaceship will deliver pressurized cargo to the station. The vehicle will not dock with the ISS, but will be handled by a robotic arm.

According to RIA Novosti, Sevastyanov said that all these efforts meant that the ISS was "evolving in an international space port."

Among other projects to be implemented on the ISS, Sevastyanov mentioned biological, biotechnological, medical and other research efforts, long-term manned missions, and assembling vehicles for the exploration of the Moon.

"Future flights to the Moon are one of the most ambitious projects. Its aim is to start the production of helium on the Moon," Sevastyanov said, adding that there were plans to establish a manned base on the Moon by 2020.

RIA Novosti reported that Russia also plans to start launching new Clipper space shuttles to the ISS from 2015, according to Sevastyanov. The Clipper will gradually replace the veteran Soyuz fleet. The Clipper is capable of taking six, instead of three, crew to the international station and 12 metric tons of cargoes, rather than two tons delivered today.

A future manned mission to Mars is also prominent on the international space agenda.

"A separate interplanetary mission segment and a special module to land on Mars will be created," he said.

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