

Russian Experts Pleased With Brazilian Space Program

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Russian experts have largely praised the progress of Brazil's space program after checking preparations for the maiden voyage of the South American country's first astronaut.

"Our task was to inspect the equipment and make sure it is safe to use on board the International Space Station (ISS)," Sergei Rybkin, a department head at the Russian Space Agency said.

During the visit to Brazil, a team of experts from the Russian agency and the Energia Rocket and Space Corporation, Russia's leading space-industry company, were satisfied with the testing facilities, though it proposed several design changes in the equipment that would be used for work in space.

"We made several technical suggestions, and the Brazilians have to follow them accordingly," Rybkin said. "These are small design changes related to automatic shutdown procedures, the absence of sharp edges on the body of various devices and the need to maintain external temperatures on the surface of the equipment at +40 Celsius (about 104 Fahrenheit) or below."

The second round of equipment testing will be conducted at the National Space Research Institute in Brazil in mid-February and after that the equipment will be delivered to Moscow for final approval.

The Russian and Brazilian presidents signed a contract in October 2005

to send a Brazil's first astronaut to the ISS on board a Russian Soyuz spacecraft in March 2006.

During the \$20-million mission, Lt. Col. Marcus Pontes, who was passed through NASA training in 2000, will conduct nine scientific experiments in the sphere of nano- and bio-technology and plant behavior in micro-gravitational conditions.

According to experts, Pontes, who will travel to the ISS on March 30 to spend 10 days on board the station, will have enough time to practice the equipment during the final stages of his preparation for the space mission in Moscow.

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