

International Space Station crew takes spacewalk

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(AP) -- Two Russian cosmonauts conducted a spacewalk on Thursday intended to activate a new segment on the International Space Station so it can dock Russian spacecraft.

The effort was expected to last nearly six hours, and Americans Jeff Williams and Timothy J. Creamer and Soichi Noguchi of Japan were supporting the mission from inside the space station.

Cosmonauts Maxim Suraev and Oleg Kotov ventured into open space at 1:05 p.m. Moscow time (1005 GMT, 5:05 a.m. EST) to activate the new

module and make it ready for docking, said Mission Control spokesman Valery Lyndin.

They will work on the Russian Poisk module to link it to the station's communications and power systems, and prepare it for future dockings with the Russian spacecraft, Lyndin said. The research module was launched in November.

The spacewalk was the third one for Kotov, who made two spacewalks in 2007 totaling more than 11 hours, and the first for Suraev.

Suraev and Williams, the station's commander, will be the first to use the new docking port when they relocate their Soyuz TMA-16 spacecraft from another docking port on the station next week.

Lyndin said that redocking the ship will allow the engineers to more efficiently adjust the station's orbit later this month.

With the U.S. shuttle fleet set to be grounded soon, NASA and other international partners will have to rely on Russian Soyuz spacecraft alone to ferry their astronauts to the space station and back.

The increase of the station's permanent crew, which had consisted of no more than three people until last May, means that two Soyuz spacecraft must be permanently docked at the station to serve as lifeboats in case of emergency.

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