

Russian cargo ship fails to dock with ISS (Update)

July 2 2010, by Stuart Williams



An unmanned Russian Progress cargo ship, seen here on the launch pad at the Baikonour cosmodrome in June, 2010, on Friday failed to dock as planned with the International Space Station (ISS) after missing the facility, mission control said.

An unmanned Russian Progress cargo ship on Friday failed to dock as planned with the International Space Station (ISS) after flying past the facility in a rare mishap, mission control said.

The Progress M-06M cargo ship, launched on June 30, is carrying 2.6 tonnes of fuel, food and water for the six astronauts on the station. Failure of automatic docking systems is known but a complete docking

failure is very rare.

"The docking was scheduled at 20:58 Moscow time (1658 GMT)," a spokeswoman for mission control told AFP.

"The cargo ship passed the station, at a safe distance. It could be said that it missed. Now the vessel is 3.0 kilometres (1.8 miles) from the station. Our specialists are monitoring the situation."

"It is likely that there will be no further attempts to dock the vessel today," the spokeswoman added.

The ITAR-TASS news agency said that initially the ISS crew had tried to dock the cargo ship automatically but then there was a technical problem and they were not able to carry out the manoeuvre manually.

The Interfax news agency said that the ISS commander, Alexander Skvortsov had told mission control that the cargo vessel was seen in a state of "uncontrollable spinning".

However Russia's space agency Roskosmos insisted that the craft was now under control and a new attempt at docking would be made on Sunday.

US space agency NASA confirmed the incident, saying on its website docking "has been delayed due to a loss of telemetry" and that the resupply craft "flew past the ISS".

Lynnette Madison, spokeswoman for the Johnson Space Centre, NASA's centre for human space flight, said the incident was unusual but there was no danger for the six astronauts on board the ISS.

"This is something unusual. I have not seen this happen before, but we

are not concerned about the people onboard the space station," she told AFP in the United States.

"There are no concerns, there are plenty of supplies aboard the station. Whenever the Russians decide to make another attempt, I am sure everything will be fine and they will attempt to dock."

A spokesman for mission control outside Moscow told the official RIA Novosti news agency that the mishap was not an emergency situation.

"Information has come via telemetry that there is no emergency situation on the cargo ship."

A commission will be formed to investigate the causes of the incident within the "shortest possible time", Russian space officials told Interfax.

The automatic docking system also failed during the last Progress supply ship docking in May although the process was successfully carried out manually.

Interfax quoted a mission control official as telling the crew: "At this point, please have your dinner. Docking has been cancelled. Nor is any work being done on the Progress. But please stay in contact."

The incident is an irritation for the Russian space programme, which is used the proudly touting how its manoeuvres have proceeded without a slip.

Russian spacecraft will bear the burden of all manned spaceflight to the ISS when the US shuttle programme is scrapped after its two final flights expected this year or early 2011.

The ISS, which orbits 350 kilometres (220 miles) above Earth, is a

sophisticated platform for scientific experiments, helping test the effects of long-term space travel on humans, a must for any trip to distant Mars.

Including Skvortsov, there are currently six astronauts aboard the station. The others are Americans Tracy Caldwell Dyson, Doug Wheelock and Shannon Walker and Russians Mikhail Kornienko and Fyodor Yurchikhin.

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Citation: Russian cargo ship fails to dock with ISS (Update) (2010, July 2) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-07-russian-cargo-ship-dock-iss.html>

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