

Russia 'loses contact' with satellite after launch

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Russia has lost contact with a major new telecommunications satellite, the Express-AM4, hours after its launch into orbit, reports said on Thursday.

Russia was attempting to locate its major new telecommunications satellite on Thursday just hours after launch in what could be another serious mishap for its space industry.

The Express-AM4 satellite was launched at 1:25 am Thursday (2125 GMT Wednesday) from Russia's Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan to provide digital television, telephone and Internet services across Russia.

Russia's Roskosmos space agency said in a statement that the launch went ahead as planned and the satellite together with the upper stage rocket separated in due time.

However "there were problems ahead of the planned fifth transmission of telemetric information and in attempts to receive a signal" from both the rocket and the satellite, it said.

"Currently measures are being taken to establish communication with the Express-AM4 satellite," Roskosmos said.



The Express-AM4 satellite was launched in the early hours of Thursday morning from Russia's Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan and was due to provide digital television, telephone and Internet services across Russia.

Later on Thursday Roskosmos said it had found the Briz-M upper stage rocket, which would have separated at 10:38 a.m Moscow time (0638GMT) from the satellite.

Newly appointed Roskosmos chief Vladimir Popovkin recently announced that Russia would like to reduce its focus on manned flights

and engage in more commercially rewarding spheres such as telecom and Internet satellite launches.

Losing the Express-AM4 would be a major blow to the new management of Roskosmos. Popovkin's predecessor Anatoly Perminov was sacked in April after three navigation satellites missed their orbit and crashed into the ocean.

The 5.7 tonne Express-AM4 satellite was developed jointly with France's EADS Astrium and is the biggest in Europe. It was supposed to support the widely announced shift to digital broadcasting in Russia.

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