

Russia space chief regrets focus on manned missions

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Specialists of Russian space agency, Roskosmos prepare a Soyuz TMA-02M spacecraft for the launch at Kazakhstan's Baikonur cosmodrome, June 2011. The new chief of Russia's space agency said it had put too much emphasis on manned space flight and needed to increase financing on projects that brought a tangible return.

The new chief of Russia's space agency on Thursday said it had put too much emphasis on manned space flight and needed to increase financing on projects that brought a tangible return.

Roskosmos chief Vladimir Popovkin, in one of his first interviews since taking office this year, said the agency was spending almost half its budget on [manned flight](#) and it was no longer good enough just to put a human in orbit.

"In [Roskosmos](#), unfortunately, at a certain time there was a very big shift to manned spaceflight. The budget for manned flight programmes takes up almost half of the budget of the entire agency," he told the Kommersant daily.

"If [manned spaceflight](#) shows results, it's useful. But if a person just wants to be in orbit, then I do not consider this to be a beneficial activity. There needs to be a return," Popovkin declared bluntly.

Russia this year celebrated 50 years since the first [manned space flight](#) by [Yuri Gagarin](#) and proudly assumed the role of the only nation able to transport humans to the [International Space Station](#) (ISS) after the US shuttle withdrawal.

But Roskosmos deputy chief Vitaly Davydov caused confusion in some quarters last month when he said the ISS should be brought down and sunk in 2020, a date not confirmed by its international partners in the project.

Popovkin did not comment on the lifespan of the ISS but indicated he believed scientists had fully explored the influence of orbital flight on humans.

He said that since Gagarin's flight in 1961 Russian and Soviet scientists have "found, examined and solved almost all the problems linked to humans being 300,000-350,000 kilometres above the earth."

As a result there were now "no major problems for manned projects in the near cosmos," he said.

"Of course Russia has obligations towards the ISS which need to be fulfilled but Roskosmos intends to increase the amount of financing for projects aimed at creating communication, navigation and

meteorological systems."

Popovkin, a former commander of Russia's space forces and a deputy defence minister, was appointed the head of Roskosmos in April after a series of mishaps under his predecessor Anatoly Perminov embarrassed the authorities.

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