

Russia resumes manned spaceflight after failures

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(L-R) US astronaut Dan Burbank and Russian cosmonauts Anton Shkaplerov and Anatoly Ivanishin at a press conference at the Baikonur cosmodrome on November 12. The crew is to blast off for the ISS in a Russian-made Soyuz space craft on November 14.

Russia on Monday launches three astronauts for the International Space Station on a key mission Moscow hopes will restore faith in its space programme after an unprecedented string of failures.

Two Russians and one American will blast off on a Soyuz-FG rocket from Russia's Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan at 0414 GMT, the first manned launch since the retirement of the US shuttle made Russia the sole nation capable of taking humans to the ISS.

It is also the first launch after an unmanned Progress supply vessel bound

for the ISS crashed into Siberia shortly after takeoff from Baikonur in August, in Russia's worst [space](#) mishap in years.

That catastrophe, blamed on a technical malfunction, prompted a complete rejig of the timetable for launches to the ISS and the temporary grounding of Soyuz rockets, the mainstay of the Russian space programme for decades.

Russia is hoping a smooth mission will lift a dark mood days after the November 9 launch of its Phobos-Grunt craft to Mars ended in another calamity with the probe failing to head on its course to the red planet.

American Dan Burbank and Russians Anton Shkaplerov and Anatoly Ivanishin will head to the ISS in a Soyuz TMA-22 capsule, joining the incumbent crew of American Mike Fossum, Japan's Satoshi Furukawa and Russia's Sergei Volkov.

Their launch had originally been scheduled for September 22, but was delayed by almost two months due to the accident with the Progress [cargo vessel](#), which had been carried up into space by a Soyuz-U rocket.



A Russian Orthodox priest blesses the Soyuz TMA-22 spacecraft at Russia's Baikonur cosmodrome on November 12. The Soyuz TMA-22 launch is

scheduled for November 14.

The last manned launch from Baikonur was in June, and the problems were a major disappointment for Russia in the year marking half a century since [Yuri Gagarin](#) made man's first voyage into space from the same historic cosmodrome.

As well as the Progress and possibly Phobos-Grunt, Russia has lost three [navigation satellites](#), an advanced military satellite and a [telecommunications satellite](#) due to faulty launches in the past 12 months.

The RIA Novosti agency quoted an anonymous source, which it said had worked for many years in the Russian space industry, as saying the sector was in crisis.

"The great number of Russian space failures in the last years were caused by the human factor -- by errors in programming, calculations for the flight and mistakes by the constructors," the source said.

The Soyuz rocket design first flew in the late 1960s and has been the backbone of the Soviet and then Russian space programmes ever since.

Its reputation was dented by the failure of the Progress to reach orbit in August but the Soyuz system for manned space flight has a proud safety record, with Russia boasting that its simplicity has allowed it to outlive the shuttle.

Whereas NASA endured the fatal loss of the Challenger and Columbia shuttles in 1986 and 2003, Moscow has not suffered a fatality in space since the crew of Soyuz-11 died in 1971 in their capsule when returning

to Earth.

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