

Russia sets sights on Moon, Mars and beyond

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File picture shows a Russian Soyuz-U booster carrying an unmanned cargo spacecraft blasting off from Kazakhstan's Baikonur cosmodrome. Russia's crisis-hit space agency intends to send its first manned mission to the Moon and deploy research stations on Mars under an ambitious plan presented to the government this month.

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The Kommersant daily said the mission statement from the Roscosmos space agency through 2030 reveals no [financial details](#) but includes plans to find outside sources of funding that do not put additional pressures on the budget.

It also sees Russia purchasing a large chunk of its rocket technology from foreign countries in order to catch up with its eternal US rival

NASA by 2020.

"Notably, the target characteristics of [Russian spacecraft](#) will be brought to world levels primarily using foreign elements," the business daily wrote.

Roscosmos has been recently beset by problems that saw its satellites fail to reach orbit and a high-profile [Mars mission](#) crash back down to Earth last year.

Experts point to a continuing [brain drain](#) from the underfunded agency and a reliance on a vast but ultimately inefficient string of state subcontractors as two factors behind Russia's growing lag behind NASA.

Russia's new space plan appears to acknowledge these problems by assigning the highest priority to technological development and modernisation.

Roscosmos then hopes to develop a reusable [space vehicle](#) similar to the retired US shuttle and eventually one that could take people to Mars and back.

Russia by 2030 should be able "to conduct a manned circum-lunar test flight with the subsequent landing of cosmonauts on its surface and their return to Earth," Kommersant quotes the Roscosmos plan as saying.

The agency says it also hopes to join other nations in deploying a network of long-term research stations on Mars that would be used a stepping stone for the Red Planet's eventual colonisation.

Roscosmos officials offered no immediate comment on their programme's publication in Kommersant.

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