Russian spaceship docks with orbiting station (Update)

March 29 2013

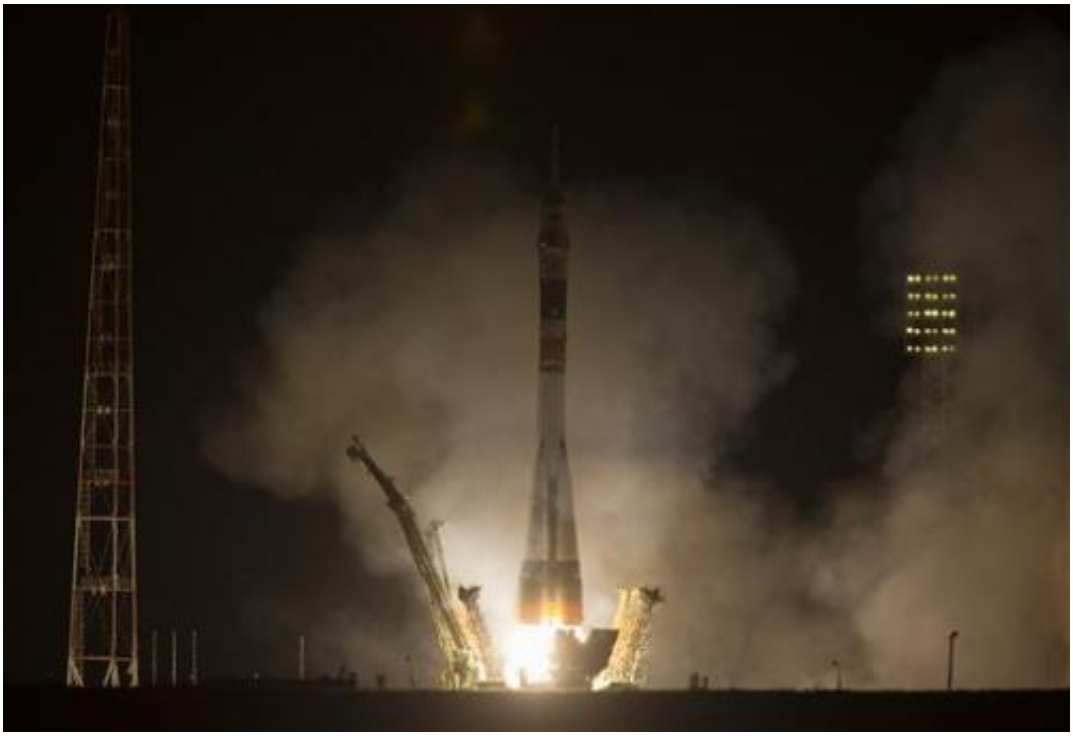
This image provided by NASA-TV shows the view from the Soyuz capsule as it approaches the International Space Station Thursday March 28, 2013. Chris Cassidy of the United States and Russians Pavel Vinogradov and Alexander Misurkin traveled six hours in the capsule before linking up with the space station's Russian Rassvet research module over the Pacific Ocean, just off Peru. It was the first time a space crew has taken such a direct route to the orbiting lab. Cassidy, Vinogradov and Misurkin are the first crew to reach the station after only four orbits instead of the standard 50-hour flight to reach the station. (AP Photo/NASA)

A Soyuz capsule carrying three astronauts successfully docked Friday

with the International Space Station, bringing the size of the crew at the orbiting lab to six.

Chris Cassidy of the United States and Russians Pavel Vinogradov and Alexander Misurkin traveled six hours in the capsule before linking up with the space station's Russian Rassvet research module over the Pacific Ocean, just off Peru, at 02:28 GMT.

"It's such a beautiful sight, hard to believe my eyes," the 59-year-old Vinogradov, who had been in space in 1997 and 2006, was heard saying on NASA TV.



In this photo provided by NASA, the Soyuz-FG rocket booster with Soyuz TMA-08M space ship carrying a new crew to the International Space Station, ISS, blasts off at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, Friday, March 29, 2013. The Russian rocket is carrying Russian cosmonauts Alexander Misurkin, Pavel Vinogradov and U.S. astronaut Christopher Cassidy. (AP Photo/NASA, Carla Cioffi)

The incoming crew will spend five months in space before returning to Earth.

About two hours passed before pressure equalized between the capsule and the station, allowing safe entrance.

"Hey, is anyone home?" joked Vinogradov as he floated into the station.

In this photo taken with a fisheye lens and with long time exposure the Soyuz-FG rocket booster with Soyuz TMA-08M space ship carrying a new crew to the International Space Station, ISS, blasts off at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, early Friday, March 29, 2013. The Russian rocket carries Russian Cosmonauts Alexander Misurkin and Pavel Vinogradov and U.S.

astronaut Christopher Cassidy. (AP Photo/Dmitry Lovetsky)

Cassidy, Vinogradov and Misurkin were greeted with cheers and hugs by American Tom Marshburn, Russian Roman Romanenko and Canadian Chris Hadfield, who have been at the station since December.

The astronauts then had a brief session with Mission Control outside Moscow, talking with friends and relatives.

"You're such a star! I'm really proud of you!" Misurkin's tearful mother said. The 35-year-old Russian is on his first flight into space.

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Their mission began with a late-night launch from the Russian-leased Baikonur launch pad in Kazakhstan.

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The new maneuver was tested successfully by three Russian Progress cargo ships, unmanned versions of the Soyuz used to ferry supplies to the space station. Russian cosmonauts have described the two-day approach maneuver in the cramped Soyuz as one of the most grueling parts of missions.

Vinogradov said at a pre-launch news conference that the shorter flight

path would reduce the crew's fatigue and allow the astronauts to be in top shape for the docking.