

First manned flight at showpiece cosmodrome delayed seven years: Russian space agency

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A picture taken on July 14, 2015 shows the launch pad at the Vostochny cosmodrome, under construction, in Russia's Far Eastern Amur region

The first manned space flight from the Vostochny Cosmodrome,

currently under construction in the Russian far east, has been pushed back seven years to 2025, Russia's space agency told AFP on Monday.

"The first [manned flight](#) from the Vostochny Cosmodrome is scheduled for 2025 with an Angara-AV5 rocket, according to the federal [space](#) programme," agency spokesman Mikhail Fadeyev said.

A 2007 presidential decree had said that the first manned launch from the cosmodrome, which is being built in the far eastern Amur region, would take place in 2018.

But the deadline outlined in the decree would have forced the [space agency](#) to adapt the new cosmodrome to ageing Soyuz rockets, which are expected to be replaced by new Russian-made Angara rockets by 2024.

The Vostochny Cosmodrome is designed to ease Russia's dependence on space launches in Baikonur, Kazakhstan, a launchpad Russia has been forced to rent at high cost since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The decision to postpone the first manned flight from the new cosmodrome, according to Fadeyev, reflects the "founding principle of Vostochny as an innovative cosmodrome" and has been approved by the "highest echelon" of government.

Developing the Angara has cost Russia at least \$2 billion since the early 1990s, sparking criticism over its high cost.

Space agency head Igor Komarov said in April that the space programme's budget for 2016-2025 would receive a 800-billion-ruble (\$11.3 billion) haircut.

The Angara, which completed a successful maiden [flight](#) last year, is the first rocket Russia has conceived since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The first launch with an Angora rocket from the Vostochny Cosmodrome is expected to take place in 2023.

Hailed by President Vladimir Putin as the country's biggest construction project, the Vostochny Cosmodrome has an estimated budget of 300 billion rubles (\$4.2 billion at the current exchange rate).

Construction at the cosmodrome has been plagued by labour disputes, corruption scandals and delays in the last months. Unpaid construction workers protested their employment conditions and appealed to Putin during his annual call-in show in April.

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, in charge of the defence and space industries, visited the site this spring, pledging the workers' living and employment conditions would be improved.

The first unmanned launch from the cosmodrome is schedule to take place in December.

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