

Two Russians, one American blast off to ISS

October 19 2016



Russian cosmonauts Sergei Ryzhikov (bottom) and Andrei Borisenko (top) and US astronaut Shane Kimbrough wave as they board the Soyuz MS-02 spacecraft at the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome on October 19, 2016

Two Russian cosmonauts and a NASA astronaut soared into orbit in a Soyuz spacecraft Wednesday at the start of a two-day journey to the International Space Station.

NASA's Shane Kimbrough and Andrei Borisenko and Sergei Ryzhikov of Roscosmos blasted off at 0805 GMT from the Baikonur cosmodrome

in Kazakhstan after their launch had been delayed by nearly one month because of technical issues.

The trio's mission is expected to last just over four months with docking at the orbital laboratory taking place on Friday.

They will join Roscosmos' Anatoly Ivanishin, NASA's Kate Rubins, and Takuya Onishi of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), whose return to Earth is set for October 30.

The Russian Orthodox Church said it had provided the country's space authorities with the relics of Seraphim of Sarov, a 18th-century saint, to be taken onboard the flight.

The local Church official who handed over the relics last month, Metropolitan Georgy, had called for the astronauts to receive "God's help in this blessed and good work," the Church said in a statement.

A few minutes after the launch, Roscosmos confirmed that it had been "successful" and that the three astronauts are scheduled to arrive at the space centre at 9:59 GMT on Friday.

The 49-year-old Kimbrough, who logged less than 16 days in space during a single mission aboard the US space shuttle Endeavour, will command the expedition aboard the orbital laboratory.



A Russian Soyuz MS-02 spacecraft carrying a crew to the International Space Station blasts off from the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on October 19, 2016

"All systems go!! 24 hours and counting until Soyuz MC-02 Expedition 49/50 launch!" Kimbrough, a father-of-three who served as a helicopter pilot in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, wrote on Twitter Tuesday.

Roscosmos flight engineer Borisenko spent 164 days in space for his first mission aboard the ISS in 2011, while Ryzhikov is entering the cosmos for the first time.

Launch delayed

Wednesday's launch is the second Soyuz space flight to be delayed this year after issues with software saw the launch of the newly upgraded

Soyuz MS-01 postponed by two weeks over the summer.

Technical mishaps have complicated plans to extend the periods during which the ISS is fully staffed with six astronauts.

But the successful launch Monday of an Antares rocket carrying an unmanned cargo capsule to the ISS—the first time since a massive explosion after liftoff two years ago—came as a relief after a series of failures that have hindered travel to the ISS.

In addition to the 2014 Antares explosion, a Russian cargo spacecraft burned up before reaching the ISS in May last year.

The Antares rocket that blasted off from Virginia earlier this week is on course to bring 2,300 kilogrammes of food and equipment to the orbital laboratory and is scheduled to arrive by Sunday.

Space is one of the few areas of cooperation that has survived the crisis in relations between Moscow and Washington, which has seen their bilateral ties plunge to their post-Cold War nadir over the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine.

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