

Space freighter burns up after launch to to ISS: Russia

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A Soyuz spacecraft stands at the launch pad of the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on November 14, 2016

An unmanned cargo ship travelling to the International Space Station burned up in the atmosphere shortly after launch on Thursday, Russia's space agency said.

"According to preliminary information, as a result of an abnormal

situation, the cargo ship's loss occurred some 190 kilometres (110 miles) above the remote, unpopulated mountainous territory of (Russia's) Tuva region, and most fragments burned up in dense layers of the atmosphere," Roscosmos said in a statement.

Roscosmos said earlier Thursday that it had lost contact with the Progress MS-04 383 seconds after launch from Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. The failure was being investigated.

The agency said the loss will "not affect the ISS system's normal operations and the subsistence of the station's crew".

NASA meanwhile said on its website that supplies at the space laboratory are "at good levels".

The cargo ship, which had been scheduled to arrive at the ISS on Saturday, was carrying 2.4 tonnes of fuel, food and equipment when it took off, Roscosmos said.

French astronaut Thomas Pesquet, who launched to the ISS for a six-month mission in November, confirmed that the ISS crew had enough supplies.

"We can last many months up here without supplies because we recycle as much as possible and have many spares," Pesquet wrote on his Facebook page.

"Spaceflight is international teamwork and some setbacks are always expected!"

Pesquet added that a cargo ship from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency was set to arrive on December 9.

Second failed launch

The Russian agency said a state commission would probe the failure but did not say whether future launches would be affected.

In April 2015, a failed Progress launch was blamed on a problem with a Soyuz rocket.

Russia put all space travel on hold for nearly three months, and a group of astronauts had to spend an extra month on the ISS.

Russia said at the time that because the same type of rocket is used for manned ships, all issues with Progress resupply missions needed to be thoroughly investigated before any manned vessels could be launched.

Russia sends three or four such spacecraft per year to supply the ISS. After making their delivery, they plummet back to Earth, burning up in the atmosphere above the Pacific Ocean.

Pesquet last month successfully blasted off to the ISS along with Russian cosmonaut Oleg Novitsky and NASA's Peggy Whitson.

The launch followed that of Russians Andrei Borisenko and Sergei Ryzhikov and American Shane Kimbrough in October, which was pushed back by nearly a month due to technical issues.

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

Russia's Soyuz capsules offer the only way for astronauts to reach the ISS since the US shuttle was retired in 2011.

A US-led venture, the ISS comprises a human outpost and laboratory in

space, assembled from components starting in 1998. It travels in low orbit at about 28,000 kilometres per hour (17,000 miles per hour).

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