

Russia approves a 10-year space budget

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The Russian government Thursday announced approval of a 10-year space program budget.

That budget will include funding for development of a reusable spacecraft to replace Russia's aging Soyuz manned launch vehicle, the BBC reported.

Russian officials say they also want to start experiments testing whether it's possible for humans to make the flight to Mars. Under that plan, six volunteers will spend 500 days in a mock space module in Moscow. The BBC said more than 20 volunteers have already applied to take part in the experiment.

Russia has been struggling to finance the International Space Station in the absence of the U.S. space shuttle fleet. The Soyuz became responsible for all trips to and from the space station following the Columbia shuttle disaster in 2003.

Although the new Russian 10-year space budget will total about \$10.5 million (300 billion roubles), it is less than what the United States spends annually on its space program.

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