

Space Firm Plans \$100 Million Fobos-Grunt-2

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Russia may build a space probe to replace the Fobos-Grunt device that plummeted into the Atlantic Ocean earlier this month, Space Research Institute head Lev Zeleny said Wednesday, RIA-Novosti reported.

The new device would cost around 3 billion rubles (\$98.7 million) to build and launch, less than the 5 billion rubles (\$164 million) the first version cost, Zeleny said. Russia will construct the replacement probe if it cannot come to an agreement with the European space agency over participation in the ExoMars mission planned for 2016.

The interplanetary Fobos-Grunt device was meant to travel to the Mars moon of Phobos to collect a soil sample and return to Earth, but it stalled in low-Earth orbit before crashing off the coast of Chile on Jan. 15.

The head of Russia's space agency said Tuesday that cosmic radiation was the most likely cause of the failure of a Mars moon probe that crashed to Earth this month, and suggested that a low quality, imported component may have been vulnerable to the radiation.

☒ The failure of the unmanned Fobos-Grunt probe was a severe embarrassment for Russia's space program, and agency head Vladimir Popovkin initially suggested that it could have been due to foreign sabotage.

☒ But on Tuesday he said in televised remarks that an investigation showed the probable cause was "localized influence of heavily radiated space particles."

Fobos-Grunt-2 could be built by 2018, Zeleny said Wednesday.

(MT, AP)

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