

RUSSIAN SPACE AGENCY CHIEF BLAMES DECADES OF INACTIVITY FOR LUNA-25 LANDER'S CRASH ON THE MOON

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File photo of a picture taken from the camera of the lunar landing spacecraft Luna-25 during its flight to the moon shows the mission emblem and the bucket of the lunar manipulator complex. | Photo Credit: Reuters

The head of Russia's space agency said on August 21 that [the Luna-25 spacecraft crashed into the moon](#) after its engines failed to shut down correctly, and he blamed the country's decades-long pause in lunar exploration for the mishap.

The [pilotless Luna-25 had been scheduled to land on August 21](#) while aiming to become the first spacecraft to touch down on the south pole of the moon, an area where scientists believe important reserves of frozen water and precious elements may exist.

Roscosmos Director General Yury Borisov said the spacecraft's engines were [turned on over the weekend to put Luna-25](#) into a "pre-landing orbit" but did not shut down properly, plunging the lander onto the moon.

"Instead of the planned 84 seconds, it worked for 127 seconds. This was the main reason for the emergency," Borisov told Russian state news channel Russia 24.

Roscosmos had contact with the spacecraft until 2:57 p.m. local time Saturday, when communication was lost and "the device passed into an open lunar orbit and crashed into the surface of the moon," he said.

The lunar mission was Russia's first since 1976, when it was part of the Soviet Union. Only three countries have managed successful moon landings: the Soviet Union, the United States and China.

"The negative experience of interrupting the lunar program for almost 50 years is the main reason for the failures," Borisov said, adding "it would be the worst decision ever" for Russia to end the program now.

The Luna-25 was in a race with an Indian spacecraft launched on July 14 to be the first to reach

the south pole. Both were expected to reach the moon between August 21 and August 23.

A previous Indian attempt to land at the moon's south pole in 2019 ended when the spacecraft crashed into the moon's surface.

[Luna-25 launched from the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Russia's Far East](#) on August 10. The spaceport is a pet project of Russian President Vladimir Putin and key to his efforts to make Russia a space superpower.

Before the launch, Roscosmos said it wanted to show Russia “is a state capable of delivering a payload to the moon,” and “ensure Russia's guaranteed access to the moon's surface.” Following the crash, the Russian space agency said the moon mission was about ensuring long-term “defense capability” as well as “technological sovereignty.” “The race to develop the moon's natural resources has begun,” Borisov said Monday. “In the future, the moon will become an ideal platform for the exploration of deep space.” Sanctions imposed on Russia since it launched [a war in Ukraine](#) nearly 18 months ago have affected its space programme, making it more difficult to access Western technology.

The Luna-25 was initially meant to carry a small moon rover, but the idea was abandoned to reduce the weight of the craft for improved reliability, analysts said.

The lunar south pole is of particular interest to scientists, who believe the permanently shadowed polar craters may contain frozen water in the rocks that future explorers could transform into air and rocket fuel..

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