

RUSSIAN SHIP DOCKS WITH ISS TO REPLACE DAMAGED CAPSULE

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The unmanned Soyuz MS-23 replacement spacecraft taking off to the International Space Station (ISS) from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on February 24, 2023. | Photo Credit: AFP

An uncrewed Russian Soyuz capsule docked early Sunday with the International Space Station and will eventually bring home three astronauts whose initial return vehicle was damaged by a tiny meteoroid.

The MS-23 ship autonomously latched to the orbiting research lab, live video from ISS-partner NASA showed, completing the Soyuz's two-day journey after launching off from Kazakhstan.

It is expected to bring home U.S. astronaut Frank Rubio and Russian cosmonauts Dmitry Petelin and Sergei Prokopyev in September.

The three arrived at the ISS last September aboard MS-22, and were originally only supposed to stay about six months, until the end of March.

But their capsule began leaking coolant in mid-December after being hit by what U.S. and Russian officials believe was a tiny space rock.

Roscosmos, the Russian space agency, decided to send MS-23 to replace the damaged vessel, but without its own three planned crew members.

With no one to replace them, Rubio, Petelin and Prokopyev will now spend almost a year in space.

The damaged MS-22 is expected to depart the space station without passengers and return to Earth in late March.

There are four others currently on board the ISS, who arrived on a SpaceX Dragon capsule last October as part of the Crew-5 mission.

They are scheduled to be joined next week by members of the Crew-6 mission — two Americans, an Emirati and a Russian — who will also arrive aboard a SpaceX capsule expected

to launch Monday from Florida.

After a few days of overlap, Crew-5 will then return to Earth.

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