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## With Astronaut Mission Brazil and Russia Tone Up Technological Ties

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Thursday, 20 October 2005

Brazil's Air Force lieutenant coronel Marcos Pontes will be the first Brazilian to travel in space. For this to come about, a contract was signed in Moscow on Tuesday, October 18, by the presidents of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and Russia, Vladimir Putin.

The document is signed in the presence of the director of the Brazilian Space Agency (AEB), Sérgio Gaudenzi. The AEB is linked to the Ministry of Science and Technology.

Astronaut Pontes will embark aboard the Russian Soyuz spacecraft on March 22, 2006, en route to the International Space Station (ISS). He will be carrying Brazilian scientific experiments to perform in a setting of microgravity. The mission is expected to last eight days.

President Lula commented that the contract is a reflection of the two countries' mutual interest in becoming better acquainted. "The Embraer (Brazilian Aviation Company) wants to produce airplanes in Russia, and they want to reach an agreement on space with Brazil," the President affirmed as he introduced the astronaut to reporters.

"Today's globalized world demands a lot of all of us, and the only solution is incisive participation. Through this Brazil will cease to be a country in a supporting role to become a leading actor on the international political scene," the president observed during the contract signing ceremony.

Pontes remarked at the event that the AEB "has been working hard on space projects" and that "things are going well in this field in Brazil."

He plans to take a Brazilian flag with him aboard the Soyuz, along with personal items, such as a hat. According to Pontes, "these symbols will be accompanied by all of Brazil's industrial development in the space field."

Brazil's relations with Russia in the space field commenced in 1988 and became closer with the hiring of Russian technical assistance for the launching of the next Satellite Launch Vehicle (VLS-1) and the signing of a memorandum of understanding in 2004, laying open the possibility of cooperation in the development of launch vehicles and satellites.

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