

After Tragedy, Brazil Restarts Space Program in 2007 with Ukraine's Help

Contributed by Aécio Amado
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The launchpad at the Alcântara Air Base, in Maranhão, in the Brazilian northeast, will recommence operations next year with the launching of a missile produced through an agreement between Brazil and Ukraine.

This information was provided by the Brazilian Minister of Science and Technology, Sérgio Rezende.

According to the Minister, the bidding process for the reconstruction of the launchpad has already been completed, and construction will begin in the coming months. He said that the agreement with Ukraine contemplates a relatively simpler launchpad.

The Alcântara launchpad was destroyed in an accident involving a VLS-1 (Satellite Launching Vehicle) on August 22, 2003. 22 people died in the accident.

Rezende also spoke about the first space voyage ever by a Brazilian astronaut, scheduled to occur in March. He said that Lieutenant-Colonel Marco César Pontes' flight to the International Space Station is one more component of the Brazilian space program, which includes the development of such technologies as satellite construction and missile fuel.

In the Minister's opinion, the trip will enhance the image of the space program. "Brazilians will feel pride when they see one of their countrymen soar to the space station," Rezende affirmed.

He informed that he and president Lula, in Brasília, will converse with Pontes, on the International Space Station, possibly on March 31 or April 1.

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