

Brazilian Astronaut Will Use Space Trip to Advance Brazil's Space Program

Contributed by Flávio Dieguez
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Brazilian astronaut Marcos Pontes, speaking to reporters as he recovers from his eight-day sojourn in space at an astronaut medical center, says he intends to use the experience he has acquired to advance the Brazilian space program.

Pontes pointed out that he has been in training programs with the Russians, the Americans and even the Japanese, and has good relations with the European space program.

Pontes said that tomorrow is a special day. On April 12, 1961, Yuri Gagarin was the first man in space. He said he was flattered when Russians compared him to Gagarin who was his hero.

According to Russian doctors, Pontes is in excellent health. His health is so good that the joke at Star City is whether or not he really went into space for eight days.

Students

Program activities created by the Brazilian Space Agency (Agência Espacial Brasileira) (AEB) reached 40,000 students in private and public schools in the Distrito Federal (Brasília) in 2005.

The objective of the program is to awaken student interest and creativity in the areas of science and technology.

According to Ivette Rodrigues, who manages the AEB school program in Brasília, the program rests on two pillars: training teachers to work with scientific and technological content related to outer space (which should be multidisciplinary), and activities such as talks, workshops and expositions in the school.

Another program activity is the Astronomy and Astronautical Olympics, in partnership with the Brazilian Astronomical Society. Last year this program visited 6,500 schools with information about the Brazilian space program and the Pontes flight to the International Space Station.

This year the Brazilian Ministry of Education will distribute didactic material about the program.

"The Pontes trip into space was a big stepping stone. Based on that experience we will work to train researchers and technicians in order to move ahead not only in space, but in other areas of knowledge," declared Rodrigues.

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