

International Space Station's recurring air leak 'poses no threat to crew': Russia

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The space station, which has served as a symbol of post-Cold War international cooperation, is now one of the last remaining areas of cooperation between Russia and the West. (File photo)

Russian space officials on Wednesday said there is a continuing air leak from the Russian section of the International Space Station (ISS) but said it posed no danger to the crew on the orbiting outpost.

“Indeed, specialists have detected an air leak onboard the ISS. There is no threat to crewmembers or the station itself,” said a statement from the Russian space agency, according to a translation by *Interfax*.

“There is an area at the end of the International Space Station that we’ve seen a leak. There is a small leak. We saw a leak increase about a week before the recent Progress launch and docking, we are working with our Russian colleagues on the next steps. Not an impact right now on the crew safety or vehicle operations,” said NASA ISS Program Manager Joel Montalbano during a briefing of the new Crew-8 mission to ISS.

Russian space officials first reported a leak in the Zvezda module in August 2020, and Russian crew members located what they believed was the source and tried to fix it, reported the *Associated Press* at the time. Another potential leak was found in a different part of the Russian section of the station in November 2021.

In September 2022, Yurisov, head of Russian space agency Roscosmos at the time, invited controversy when he said that ISS is dangerous and unfit for its purpose. He said that mass equipment failures and ageing parts were endangering the safety of crew on the 24-year-old station. His words seem almost prophetic in hindsight, as ISS has had many issues since then.

In December 2022, the Russian Soyuz MS 22 spacecraft began venting coolant into space, rendering it unusable. Roscosmos had to send its Soyuz MS 23 spacecraft to bring back the astronauts, and the MS 22 spacecraft had to be brought back down to Earth for analysis.

Currently, the space station's lifetime is scheduled end in 2030. NASA, the Canadian Space Agency, and the European Space Agency have committed to operating it till 2030. Roscosmos, meanwhile, has committed to the space station only till 2028. NASA plans to spend up to \$1 billion to use a tug to deorbit the space station when it comes to the end of its life.

Long before that, NASA will train an Indian astronaut for a mission to the space station ahead of the country's planned crewed Gaganyaan mission.

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