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Crewmembers Say Mars 500 Experiment Went Well

Jessica Golloher | Moscow



Photo: REUTERS

Participants of the Mars500 experiment, which simulated a 520-day flight to Mars, pose for a picture during a news conference in Moscow, November 8, 2011

Six men who spent a year-and-a-half in a simulation project testing the psychological effects of a return voyage from Mars shared their experiences at a Moscow news conference Tuesday. The crewmembers of the simulated Mars spaceflight say it was a tough mission.

Wearing blue jump suits stamped with the Mars 500 project logo, members of the international simulation crew described what it was like to live in a windowless capsule for 520 days with limited contact with the outside world.

Russian crewmember Sukhrob Kamalov, a surgeon, says it was difficult at times to deal with so many different nationalities and cultures.

He says we have an international crew and that everyone is from different nationalities and different countries. He says people have different characters, but in the end everyone managed to live together for 520 days in such a small space.

"Small space" is right: 550 cubic meters to be exact. The simulation unit included medical, living, landing ... storage and Martian surface modules," Kamalov said.

All of the modules, except for one, were used for living and working. The living space was decorated with wood paneling, furniture and rugs in an effort to make it look more like home.

But many of the crew members say that while space officials tried to make the space as comfortable as possible, it was still a difficult experience.

Crewmember Diego Urbina is an Italian-Columbian engineer. He says he found it especially hard to be separated from his friends and family for so long. But he says the lengthy mission also taught him about himself and the importance of cooperation:

"It put me more in contact with my own humanity, so you see that you are not a superman, you have limitations and you have to overcome them by yourself and also with the help of your crew mates," said Urbina.

And according to Chinese crew member Wang Yue, it's that cooperation with his crew mates that got him through the ordeal. He says he now considers the five men a part of his family.

"It was really not easy and we did it as a team, we trust each other," Yue said.

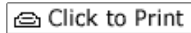
It's likely that members of this crew will be part of the next generation of astronauts for future Russian and European missions to Mars.

Russian space officials say they hope to send a manned mission to Mars by 2040. But Russia's space program has been beset by difficulties lately, including the grounding of its Soyuz rocket fleet a few months ago after one failed to reach orbit. Those rockets are currently the only means to ferry passengers and cargo to the International Space Station.

Undeterred, Russian space officials announced the launch of the nation's first unmanned deep-space probe in two decades - a three-year mission to bring a soil sample back from Phobos, one of the two Martian moons. Coming on the heels of its successful Mars mission simulation, Russia is clearly hoping to bring some glory back to its space program.

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