

## A landmark event, says Madhavan Nair

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Photo:

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**ISRO might:** ISRO chairman G. Madhavan Nair (centre) at a press conference at Sriharikota on Monday. With him are (from left): VSSC director K. Radhakrishnan, mission director George Koshy, SHAR director M. Annamalai and MD, Antrix, K.R. Sridharamurthy.

CHENNAI: January 21, 2008 signified “a landmark event” in the history of Antrix Corporation Limited because on that day India’s Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle put in orbit an Israeli satellite called Tecsar in “a full-fledged commercial launch” transaction, said G. Madhavan Nair, chairman, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Antrix Corporation is the marketing agency of the ISRO/Department of Space.

Mr. Nair, who addressed a press conference here after a “core-alone” PSLV successfully put Tecsar in orbit after a lift-off from the spaceport at Sriharikota, said: “We won the contract against stiff competition from many other players. The orbit we have achieved will be the envy of any person in the launch service... It recognises the launch capability of ISRO on a par with other leading players in the world.” Tecsar, weighing 300 kg, belonged to Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).

K.R. Sridhara Murthi, Managing Director, Antrix Corporation, said Antrix had “charged quite a lot above” the normal international rates of \$15,000 to \$20,000 a kg for putting satellites in low-earth orbit. Antrix’s revenue for the financial year 2006-07 was Rs.660 crore from leasing transponders, sale of remote-sensing images and launching other countries’ satellites. Of this, profit was Rs.105 crore after deducting tax. “For the current financial year, 2007-08, we are targeting a revenue of Rs.750 crores,” Mr. Sridhara Murthi said.

(It was Antrix Corporation which issued a press release on the PSLV successfully putting Tecsar into orbit. Normally, it is ISRO which issues the press releases).

Mr. Nair denied that there was any pressure at all from the Gulf countries on India not to go ahead with the launch of the Israeli satellite. The launch was postponed from September 2007 to January 2008 because “we had to resolve certain technical issues [with the satellite] which took some time. That put us in the monsoon season. As soon as the monsoon was over, we have launched now,” he said.

On the allegations that Tecsar was a “spy satellite” because its resolution was one metre, ISRO chairman claimed that he was not familiar with the details of the satellite. It was a radar-imaging satellite that could take pictures of the earth during day time, night, clouds or rain. “I don’t think there is a view that there is a class of satellites called spy satellites,” he said. India used images from Canadian satellites with a resolution of two to three metres for its agricultural operations, controlling floods, etc. “Applications are in the minds of the people. It [satellite] is only a tool,” he said.

Mission Director George Koshy called it a “wonderful” launch. “Everything went perfect,” he said. C. Venugopal was the Vehicle Director.

According to the ISRO chairman, ISRO would have a heavy schedule in 2008 with a series of launches. In March, PSLV would launch Cartosat-2A, a satellite for mapping applications. In April, PSLV-XL would put in orbit Chandrayaan-I, India’s first mission to the moon. A Geo-synchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) with an indigenously developed cryogenic upper stage would take to the sky. Israel’s scientific instrument called Tel Aviv University Ultra-Violet Experiment (TAUVEX) will fly on board a GSAT from Sriharikota. Oceansat-2 would also be put in orbit.

Mr. Sridhara Murthy said ISRO would launch three customers’ payloads in 2008. They included a cluster of three nano satellites from the Netherlands to meet educational objectives and to test miniaturisation and a new software and another nano satellite weighing 14 kg from the University of Toronto for surveying radio frequency.

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