

ISRO to launch moon mission in October-December

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) plans to launch its first unmanned moon mission, Chandrayan-I, between October and December, a top official said here Thursday.

'We are hopeful of launching the spacecraft in the third quarter of 2008-09. The mission would be targeted to capture images of the lunar surface,' ISRO chairman G. Madhavan Nair told reporters during an interactive session here.

'The objectives of the Chandrayan-1 mission are to carry out high resolution mapping of topographic features in 3-D and to harness the science payloads, the lunar craft and the launch vehicle with suitable ground support systems,' he added.

The lunar craft would not be landing, but will travel in a polar orbit around the moon and pay special attention to gathering data on the polar icecaps that may contain traces of water.

'It would take at least two years for the spacecraft to cover the entire lunar surface,' Nair said.

Talking about ISRO's future plans, he said: 'After launching Chandrayan-I, we are planning to launch a Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) with an indigenous cryogenic engine. All preliminary testing has already been completed and it's expected to be launched by the end of this fiscal (March 2009).'

'We are planning to launch 70 missions in the 11th Five Year Plan period (2007-12). The number of missions would be three times what we have done in the past five years,' Nair said.

Nair was in town to receive the Raja Rammohan Puraskar, 2008 for his outstanding contributions to the development of space technology and its application.

He said that ISRO's Regional Remote Sensing Centre (RRSC) that is located in Kharagpur in West Midnapore would soon be shifted to Kolkata.

'The West Bengal government has already given a piece of land at Salt Lake and the construction work has also started. We are expecting the centre to be operational by next year,' he said.

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