israel: Israel launches first environmental research satellite

Jerusalem, Aug 2 (IANS) Israel has successfully launched its first spatial environmental research vehicle designed for orbital monitoring of Earth's vegetation, the Israel Space Agency (ISA) said on Wednesday.

The Venus satellite (Vegetation and Environment Monitoring New Micro-Satellite) is an earth-observation micro-satellite designed jointly by Israel's agency and France's National Centre for Space Studies (CNES), Efe news reported.

Venus has a dual mission: one scientific and the other technological. The scientific mission will monitor Earth's vegetation using a camera capable of recording 12 narrow spectral bands.

The technological mission will test the operation of an innovative electric propulsion system based on the Israeli-designed Hall Effect Thrusters.

A Hall-effect thruster (HET) is a relatively low power device used to propel a spacecraft after entering orbit or farther out into space.

Venus' launch took place on board an Arianespace Vega launcher from Kourou, French Guyana, in a joint project between ISA and France's space agency CNES.

It will be inserted into a near polar sun-synchronous orbit at an altitude of 720 km with a two-day flyover revisiting time.

The microsatellite, which weighed 265 kg on launch, will send high-resolution photos to track climate change and aid efforts to tackle desertification, erosion, and pollution.

The first Israeli satellite will also be used for agricultural and environmental research with its innovative electric propulsion system allowing it to navigate more accurately than other satellites, according to ISA.

Venus will circle the planet 29 times every 48 hours and will remain in service for four and a half years, after which it will be parked into a lower orbit.

The first photos of the satellite are expected some five hours after the launch, but will only be available to researchers in November next year.

In addition, another Israeli-manufactured satellite was launched on Wednesday on a reconnaissance mission capable of taking very high-resolution images.

The ISA is part of the Israeli Ministry of Science and Technology which has invested around $1.3 billion in research projects related to this satellite.

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