Source : www.thehindu.com Date : 2018-12-06

‘BIG BIRD’ TO TAKE INTERNET TO VILLAGES

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Boost to connectivity:An Ariane 5 rocket lifts off from the European Spaceport in Guiana on Wednesday.AFPHANDOUT

India’s first six-tonne-class ‘big bird’ in space, advanced communication satellite GSAT-11, was put into orbit in the early hours of Wednesday from the European spaceport in Guiana in South America.

Its mission is to enable high-speed satellite-based Internet services to users in rural and remote areas and to businesses down home over the next 15 years.

The heaviest ever to be built by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the 5,854 kg satellite was launched from the Guiana Space Centre at Kourou at 2.07 a.m. IST on Wednesday, December 5. The local time at the launch centre was 5.37 p.m. on December 4.

The satellite and the launch fee have cost ISRO Rs. 1,200 crore.

The liftoff of GSAT-11 and a South Korean co-passenger satellite on European space vehicle Ariane 5 VA246 was watched and cheered by ISRO Chairman K. Sivan.

In his post-launch remarks, Dr. Sivan said, “It will meet most of the requirements of providing broadband connectivity to rural and inaccessible village panchayats under Bharat Net, which is part of the Digital India initiative.”

Launched in October 2011, Bharat Net (earlier called the National Optical Fibre Network) aims to provide 2.5 lakh village panchayats with e-banking, e-education, e-health and e-governance, among others, through reliable broadband connectivity.

This, along with GSAT-29 and GSAT-19, smaller satellites already launched from within India, will herald a new era of satellite-driven reliable high-throughput data services. Villages, remote locations and VSAT operators, who drive private and public sector data services, will be the main gainers.

Enabling in-flight Internet and village web services are the government’s other goals: the latter promises to bridge the urban-rural digital divide.

GSAT-11 carries eight transponders for the first time in the complex and efficient Ka frequency band, and 38 transponders in the Ku band. The Ka band enables smart coverage of places with multiple and reusable spot beams.

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