

ISRO'S GSAT-7A TO ADD MUSCLE TO AIR FORCE

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Military communication satellite GSAT-7A, due to be launched on December 19 evening from Sriharikota, is expected to add a new space-based dimension to the way Indian Air Force interlinks, operates and communicates with its aircraft.

Although all Indian communication satellites offer capacity to the armed forces, GSAT-7A will be the first one built primarily for the IAF to qualitatively unify its assets and improve combined, common intelligence during operations. With integrated action being a buzzword it will also support aerial activities of the Army and the Navy where required.

“About 70% of it would be for the Air Force and the rest for the needs of the Army,” said a source in Delhi. The ground force’s Army Aviation Corps operates many helicopters, uses UAVs and will acquire fixed wing aircraft in future — all for surveillance and rescue missions.

Multiple sources said the satellite using Ku band will enable superior real time aircraft-to-aircraft communication; and between planes that are in flight and their commanders on the ground.

It would enhance by many times the coverage now provided by ground communication systems such as radars and stations of the Army.

Out-of-sight and remote areas where ground infrastructure and signals are difficult would get into the critical information loop.

Forward leap

A military veteran said, “It will be a very important step towards what we call network-centric operations or warfare. It will enable communication and data linking at forward places and air defence centres. Pilots can communicate much better with headquarters while they fly. Headquarters can receive data in real time.”

Since August 2013, the Navy has a satellite largely for its use, the GSAT-7, for similarly linking its ships to command on land.

The GSAT-7A/ GSLV-F11 mission will also wrap up the calendar year for the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). The GSLV-F11 space vehicle will release it to an eventual geostationary orbit about 36,000 km from Earth.

However, it will become fully functional after a month of testing payloads.

In 2018, ISRO launched GSAT-11 on December 5 on a European vehicle from Kourou, GSAT-29 on November 14 on its GSLV-MkIII vehicle from Sriharikota, and the ill-fated GSAT-6A on March 29 from Sriharikota.

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