

ISRO opens doors to private sector

A file photo of a satellite being built at the ISRO Satellite Centre in BengaluruISRO

In an attempt to increase the number of satellite launches and build the capacity of the private sector, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) issued a tender on Monday to the private industry for Assembly, Integration and Testing (AIT) of 30-35 satellites.

“ISRO has issued a Request For Proposal (RFP) to the private industry to build 30-35 satellites over three years. Under this, 4-5 companies would be selected after evaluation and awarded parallel contracts. They would be responsible for the AIT of satellites at ISRO facilities,” said Dr. M. Annadurai, Director ISRO satellite centre. He was speaking at the first international seminar on Indian space programme jointly organised by ISRO and the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

He said ISRO currently launches 3-4 launches per year but the demand is for 16-18 satellites. ISRO expects to get the responses to the RFP by December 5, complete selection of the companies by January 5 and sign contracts by February 5.

“The aim is to launch 3-4 satellites in 2018 and improve it further,” Dr. Annadurai said to a question from *The Hindu*.

Gaining experience

Another ISRO official said it had tried this model on a pilot scale with two satellites. “Alpha Design Technologies was allowed to build satellites at our facilities. We did the hand holding on the first one and tried their staff. The second satellite was completely built by them at our facility,” he said.

In the next step, the idea is to let the private industry build their own facilities after gaining enough expertise, the official added. The private sector already supplies majority of the sub-systems in satellite manufacturing.

Giving the reason for the push, he said in the next 3-4 years ISRO plans to launch 58 satellites. “Our in-house capacity is limited. So we are looking to offload 30-40% of the work to the private sector,”

To this end, ISRO has built a space technology park spread over 25 acres in Bengaluru where the entire range of facilities have been set up for use by the industry.

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