

‘ SCIENCE MUST BECOME THE PRIORITY OF SPACE MISSIONS, WE NEED MORE MONEY FOR IT’

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Space Technology & related matters

S Somanath, Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), told *The Hindu* that scientific missions ought to be more important in the future. Excerpts:

The LVM3 launch vehicle successfully placed 36 satellites of the privately owned OneWeb consortium. However, you have recently indicated that the Chandrayaan-3 mission will now likely only be in June 2023. Are commercial launches more important to ISRO than scientific missions?

The entire space sector is based on demand. When there is demand, I have to fulfil it. We have had only four science missions but have 53 satellites in orbit. The science component has always been very, very small. Science was never a priority but it must become the priority in the future. We've always had a very limited budget for science but we need more money so that we can do science missions. We are not doing enough in science but if we prioritise science, we will not get money.

The space policy, which will define the future of commercial space applications in India, has been on the anvil for a while. Is it expected soon and will it spell out the functions of New Space India Ltd. (NSIL). (NSIL is a public sector company and the commercial arm of the ISRO).

The policy doesn't talk about the structure of the organisation. Policy only spells out the intent and that is to have more non-governmental entities enter the space sector. The elements of this and how we can achieve this 'intent' is what the policy will spell out.

In the future, does ISRO aspire to be NASA, in the sense more focused on ambitious science missions?

NASA is the national space agency of the United States and decides that country's space activities. ISRO is the national space agency of India but the way both operate could be different because the U.S. ecosystem already has a developed industry.

In India, there is no industry capable of doing anything (space launches, satellite manufacturing) independently. Thus, ISRO's role is to mentor and develop the industry ecosystem here. Once we get to that point, we could discuss the role of ISRO. We have our own model.

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