



The Package | 101 Stories

Kulasekarapattinam to be on global scientific map

March 17, 2022 03:50 pm | Updated 03:50 pm IST

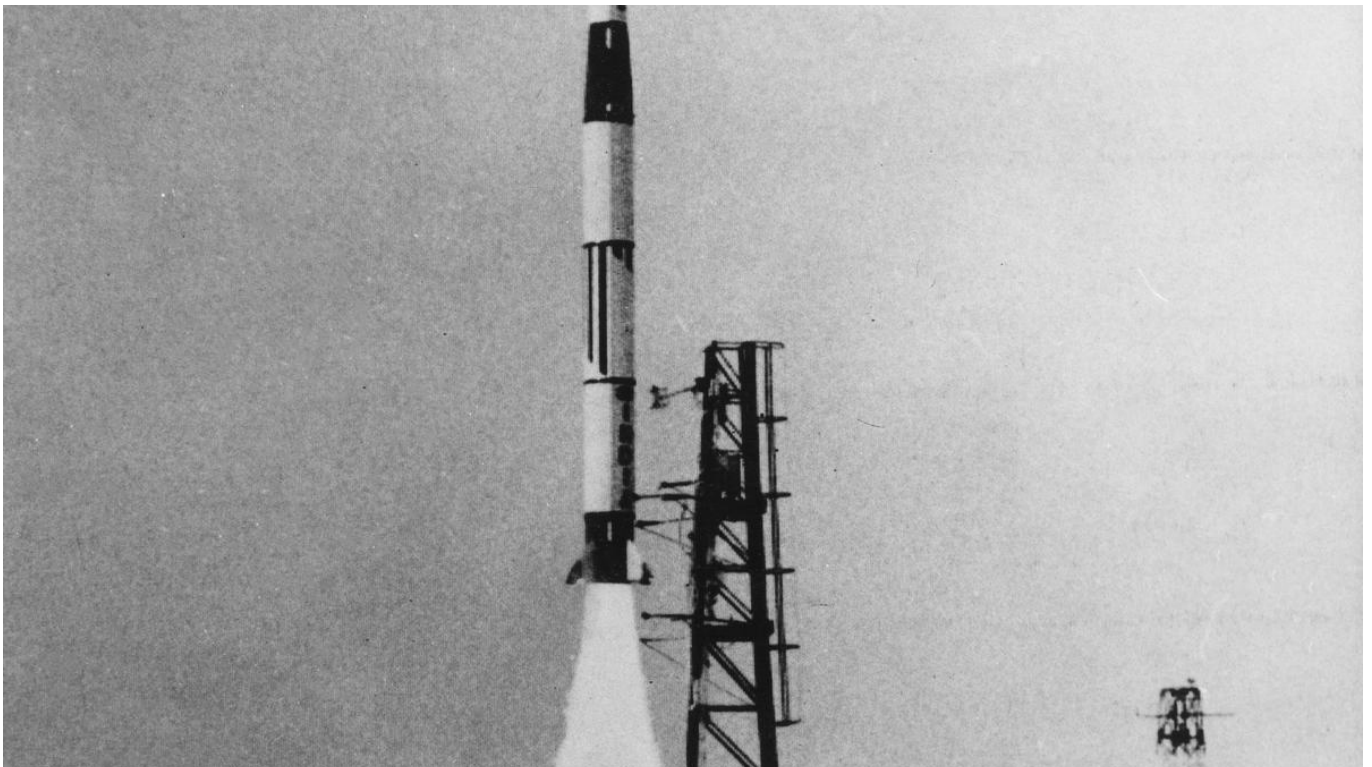


T.K. ROHIT

COMMENTS

SHARE

🔖 READ LATER



India's satellite launch vehicle SLV-3 being launched from Sriharikota on its first developmental flight on May 31, 1981. It placed the second Indian satellite Rohini into space. | Photo Credit: THE HINDU ARCHIVES

A small town panchayat in the southern district of Thoothukudi, known for its religious fervour during the Dussehra festival, will soon be on the global scientific map.

Every year, lakhs of devotees descend on Kulasekarapattinam, the town of less than 10,000 residents, during the festival, with many dressing up as deities and various animals, who pay obeisance to the deity Muthaaramman. The festival is celebrated with so much fervour that it is regarded second only to the Dussehra celebrations in Mysore.

That primary identity will, however, change in the coming years as the Indian Space Research Organisation

(ISRO) sets up its second spaceport at Kulasekarapattinam from where ISRO will launch satellites weighing less than 500 kg on board its Small Satellite Launch Vehicles (SSLVs). Currently, the ISRO has two launchpads at Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh, closer to Chennai, from where it launches satellites on the PSLV and the GSLV.

The proposed launch pad will help to increase the performance of the launch vehicle as the location allows the rockets to go directly southwards, unlike in Sriharikota where the launch vehicles have to go southeast first, avoid Sri Lanka and take a turn after crossing Sri Lanka. “In the process, we will be losing a lot of energy. If there’s a possibility of having a launchpad towards the south, then the loss of performance will be reduced...performance gain will be there,” said K. Sivan, former Chairman, ISRO.

Mr. Sivan said that if the SSLV was launched from Sriharikota carrying a 500-kg satellite to orbit, the capacity of the vehicle will be zero and the entire payload capacity would be lost. The launchpad at Kulasekarapattinam is aimed at eliminating this disadvantage.

The Kulasekarapattinam launchpad will also enhance employment opportunities for the local population and lead to economic growth in the region, he said.

Thoothukudi Member of Parliament Kanimozhi, who had been seeking the launchpad at Kulasekarapattinam since her earlier tenure in the Rajya Sabha, concurred. “This launchpad will be an important development for the south of Tamil Nadu. Many allied industries will come up and the economy of the region will also develop”. She added that as an extension of this, the airport and port facilities will have to improve.

Land acquisition for the spaceport is in its final stages and the government is likely to hand over the land to the ISRO by the end of this year, she said.

According to Mr. Sivan, once land acquisition and handing over was complete, the ISRO would begin construction of the launchpad. While it could take about a year for the launchpad to be set up, other priorities and the budget allocation would have to be taken into account by the ISRO.

He said the SSLVs will have tremendous potential, especially in attracting international customers, while the local industry can launch the satellites themselves in the future. “Mostly after the developmental flight [of the SSLV], the industry will be able to launch satellites on its own. Technology will be transferred to the industry and they can handle their launches. It will have a different ecosystem...international demand will be there,” he said.

But more important, Ms. Kanimozhi stressed, would be the impact satellite launches from the launch pad would have on the young minds in the region. “It will help students develop a scientific temper and a quest to understand things,” she felt.

Once the launchpad is up and running, the beach at Kulasekarapattinam will not only see the gaiety of the religious minded but will bask in the orange glow of the fumes of the rockets launched from the small town.