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India's Own Space Observatory

Sriharikota: India on Monday joined a select group of nations, including the US, Japan, Russia and Europe, owning space observatory with the successful launch of ASTRO-SAT by its rocket, which also put into orbit six other foreign satellites. Incidentally, this is the first time that an Indian rocket launched satellites from the US. ISRO chairman A S Kiran Kumar congratulated the ISRO team. **P6**

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India's Tryst With Exotic: ASTROSAT Up in Orbit

by Jonathan Ananda

Sriharikota: The payload which lifted off from India's only spaceport on Monday is not just another launch on just another PSLV. The C30 mission has put what is expected to be one of ISRO's most important contributions to astrophysics and astronomy.

The ASTROSAT, and its five state-of-the-art eyes in the sky, will study the stuff of dreams — black holes, supernova remnants, neutron stars, and maybe even dark matter.

Twenty-five minutes and 32

seconds after the PSLV-C30 lifted off from the first launch pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre here, the mission was a success.

The PSLV was also ferrying the first US satellites to be carried by ISRO, crossing the half century mark in foreign satellites placed in orbit.

The ASTROSAT, however, was the star. From Monday,

India became the fourth country after the US, Russia and Japan, to have operational space observatories in orbit. But ASTROSAT is the first to observe celestial objects in multiple wavelengths at the same time — visible, ultraviolet and X-ray. The strength of the observatory though, remains in observing high energy events and objects through its strong

X-ray toolkit.

The most exciting aspect of ISRO's latest space toy is that its focus will be celestial objects — black holes, neutron stars and supernova remnants, said K Suryanarayana Sarma, Project Director, ASTROSAT/ADITYA-L1.

Data from the ASTROSAT is expected to throw light on aspects of cosmos that are hardly understood.

The first six months after calibration, which will take another six months, will be a lock in period for the scientists. After that, the data will be thrown

open to the public.

"There will be a committee of scientists who will examine the proposals, both domestic and international, and allot time on the satellite to ones that they deem worthy. It will be open to university students, distinguished scientists, universities etc," Sarma said.

ISRO has managed to give Indian scientists access to their own X-ray space telescope — one that is in some aspects, like ISRO Chairman A S Kiran Kumar said, "more advanced than international projects with launch dates two years away."

India is the fourth nation to have operational space observatories in orbit. ASTROSAT is the first to observe celestial objects in multiple wavelengths