Indian rocket suffers catastrophic failure during launch, Earth-watching satellite lost

An Indian rocket carrying a new Earth-observation satellite for the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) suffered a catastrophic failure shortly after launching early Thursday (Aug. 12) from the country's Satish Dhawan Space Centre on Sriharikota Island in eastern India. The liftoff occurred at 5:43 a.m. local time in India (8:13 p.m. EDT Aug 11/0013 GMT).

The launch failure, the first for India since 2017, occurred sometime past the six-minute mark after the mission's rocket, the 12-story-tall Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle, had ignited its cryogenic third stage.

The launch "could not be fully accomplished" because of a "technical anomaly observed in the cryogenic stage, ISRO chair K. Sivan said in a brief televised statement after the failed mission.

Video: Watch India's GSLV rocket lift off on ill-fated launch

An Indian GLSV rocket carrying the EOS-O3 Earth observation satellite for the Indian Space Research Organisation lifts off from Second Launch Pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre on Sriharikota Island, India on Aug. 12, 2021. It failed to reach orbit.

An Indian GLSV rocket carrying the EOS-O3 Earth observation satellite for the Indian Space Research Organisation lifts off from Second Launch Pad of the Satish Dhawan Space Centre on Sriharikota Island, India on Aug. 12, 2021. It failed to reach orbit. (Image credit: ISRO)

Lost with the GSLV rocket was the EOS-03 Earth observation satellite designed to be a "state-of-the-art" tool for ISRO to study our planet. The satellite was expected to last at least 10 years working to provide near real-time images of India, track natural disasters and other short-term events and collect data to assist agriculture and forestry by monitoring crop health, according to an ISRO mission description.

The GSLV launch failure breaks a streak of 14 successful launches for ISRO, the launch tracking site Spaceflight Now reported. It began after the the 2017 failure of a different Indian rocket, a smaller Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle, carrying a satellite for the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System. That 2017 failure was the first in 20 years for India's PSLV, according to SpaceNews.

Related: India's human spaceflight plans coming together despite delays

An Indian Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle carrying the EOS 3 satellite rolls out to its launchpad at the Satish Dhawan Space Center ahead of a planned launch at 8:43 p.m. EDT on Aug. 11, 2021. It will be Aug. 12 local time at launch.

An Indian Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle carrying the EOS 3 satellite rolls out to its launchpad at the Satish Dhawan Space Center ahead of a planned launch at 8:43 p.m. EDT on Aug. 11, 2021. It was Aug. 12 local time at launch. (Image credit: ISRO)

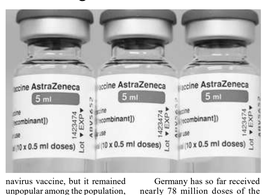
The last year has been a trying one for India's space program.

After the launch of EOS-01 in January 2020, the country's launches were placed on hold during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. The resumed late that year with two missions, one each in November and December. That November launch successfully placed the EOS-01 Earth observation satellite into orbit.

The delays from the pandemic prompted ISRO to move the launch of EOS-03 ahead of the EOS-02 mission, originally targeted to fly in March 2021, according to a report by the Indian Express news site. That mission had been rescheduled for no earlier than September and ISRO had planned to launch at least four more missions by the end of 2021, the report stated.

All five of those missions will likely be on hold as ISRO investigates the cause of the GSLV launch failure.

Germany donates AstraZeneca jabs to Tajikistan



Germany has donated nearly 1.3 million doses of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine to low-income countries, the government announced on Monday.

Deputy government spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer told a news conference in Berlin that as part of Germany's commitment to the UN's COVAX initiative, authorities have begun shipping surplus COVID vaccines, including AstraZeneca, which has so far proved unpopular domestically.

She said the first 1.3 million AstraZeneca doses were being delivered to Sudan (357,600 doses), Ethiopia (271,200 doses), Afghanistan (213,600 doses), Tajikistan (100,800 doses), and Uzbekistan (355,200 doses).

The EU's richest country has so far purchased nearly 17.5 million doses of AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine, but it remained unpopular among the population, although both German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Chancellor Angela Merkel personally chose it in hope of boosting public confidence.

Germany has so far received nearly 78 million doses of the BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine, 17.5 million doses of AstraZeneca, 12.3 million doses of Moderna, and 4 million doses of Johnson & Johnson.

Bangladesh ends a strict lockdown even as cases rise.

Bangladesh's health care system is buckling under the ferocity of the country's third, and by far deadliest, wave of coronavirus infections, and only 4 percent of the population is fully vaccinated. Yet the country of 165 million people lifted much of its lockdown on Wednesday.

Banks, shops and malls were allowed to reopen, and buses and trains were operating at half capacity. That followed the reopening of the garment industry, a mainstay of the economy, two weeks ago.

And while health experts feared that the lifting of restrictions would worsen the outbreak, the effect of the restrictions on people's livelihoods in Bangladesh has been devastating. The pandemic has pushed at least 24.5 million into poverty, according to an April study.

Government advisers say the country's leaders have little choice but to reopen. "It's not possible for the government to keep the country locked down forever," Mohammad Shahidullah, the president of the government's Covid-19 committee, told the local news media.

Nytimes

USAID reaches over a million people through anti-trafficking campaign in Uzbekistan

Annually, World Day against Trafficking in Persons is observed on July 30 around the globe. This year, USAID's Safe Migration in Central Asia activity, implemented by Winrock International, in cooperation with the Government of Uzbekistan, civil society, and private organizations marked the occasion with activities across Uzbekistan to raise awareness about human trafficking and ways to prevent it.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of Uzbekstanis migrate to Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and other destinations to earn a living. According to the Uzbekistan Agency of External Labor Migration of the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations, nearly 1.7 million Uzbekistani citizens are currently working abroad. Many of these migrants lack information about the risks they may face or how to avoid falling prey to human trafficking.

According to the U.S. State Department's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report 2021, Uzbek authorities identified 150 victims of trafficking in 2020, whereas non-governmental organizations (NGOs) identified 239 victims during the same period.

The State Department's TIP Report monitors challenges and progress of countries on their efforts to address human trafficking issues and provides recommendations on improvement. Uzbekistan advanced from the "Tier 2 Watch List" to "Tier 2," in 2021, indicating that the country "does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so."

Among the TIP Report recommendations for Uzbekistan is a call for increased awareness among labor migrants on their rights and obligations. It is therefore significant that on July 1, the very day the TIP Report was released, the Government of Uzbekistan launched a 30-day campaign in partnership with the USAID-funded Safe Migration in Central Asia activity and its NGO partners together with UNODC, ILO, and other local and international organizations to share information on safe migration, resources available, and where people can find help and solutions.

Through NGO partners, Safe Migration disseminated printed information about human trafficking and hotline numbers for victims of human trafficking across the country. "Most reactions from locals were positive. People wanted to know more. They kindly asked us to do more public awareness activities," said an NGO volunteer distributing pamphlets in buses and answering passengers' questions.

The Safe Migration in Central Asia activity launched, "Transportation against Trafficking" as part of the campaign focused on intercity buses and trains. Private transport firms agreed to place stickers with instructions on how to avoid human trafficking in their vehicles. Uzbekistan Railways also agreed to play a Safe Migration-produced video informing travelers about the signs of human trafficking.

In partnership with the Government of Uzbekistan and the NGO Istiqbolli Avlod, Safe Migration produced and distributed 10,000 informational brochures across Uzbekistan including with assistance from the private sector. For example, in Namangan, Istiqbolli Avlod's branch partnered with a local sewing enterprise and conducted an event raising awareness about forced labor for its employees. The campaign had nearly immediate results. The hotline received a call about 12 migrants whose passports had been confiscated in Kazakhstan. Additionally, several women called the helpline to get psychological and legal help and for consultations on safe migration.

To reach the youth and active social media users, Safe Migration engaged popular Uzbek bloggers to explain in a video on what is human trafficking and how to avoid the risks of being trafficked. Bloggers posted the video on their social media channels reaching 44,000 of their viewers, and through posts on various social media channels, their video message reached more than 230,000 viewers in three days.

In a photo zone at a central park in Tashkent, Safe Migration and its partners placed cutouts of animated heroes informing passersby about human trafficking. Organizers engaged park visitors in a quiz as a way of explaining human trafficking issues.

In cooperation with the Sub-Commission on Countering Trafficking in Persons, Safe Migration also developed and launched a Telegram bot called @salom_migrant_bot, a virtual online consultant on migration and human trafficking, and has already reached more than 300,000 views. Through the chatbot, labor migrants can learn about the rules of work and residence abroad, the rights and obligations of labor migrants, as well as about the types of support available for migrants. The bot also has many useful tips related to COVID-19.

The campaign culminated on July 30 with a roundtable including participation from international organizations, NGOs, and state organizations discussing the issue of trafficking in Uzbekistan at the regional and international level. Participants shared some global best practices and the Uzbek government reported on the measures being taken by the country to improve the situation.

Having reached over a million people for two consecutive years, through a month-long campaign, USAID and Safe Migration in Central Asia will build on this momentum and continue to inform migrants about their rights and resources available to them.

usembassy

With 2,616 new cases, Nepal's Covid-19 tally reaches 723,296

The Health Ministry reports 30 new deaths including figures from the past few days based on statistics from the Nepal Army. With 2,616 new cases, Nepal's Covid-19 tally reaches 723,296

Nepal on Wednesday reported 2,616 new coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours taking the nationwide infection tally to 723,296.

Similarly, 865 people tested positive in a total of 5,749 antigen tests, according to the Health Ministry.

As of Wednesday, 3,718,303 PCR and 375,399 antigen tests have been carried out across the country.

A total of 10,907 PCR tests were performed in the past 24 hours, according to the Health Ministry.

In its regular situation report, the ministry did not mention the death toll over the past 24 hours. It, however, reported 30 Covid-19-related fatalities, which included the number of deaths managed by Nepal Army on different dates.

The countrywide death toll has now reached 10,180. The number of active cases stands at 38,033. According to the ministry, 675,083 infected people have recovered from the disease so far; 1,885 of them in the last 24 hours.

Kathmandu Valley recorded 964 new infections in the past 24 hours. Of these, 663 cases were confirmed in Kathmandu, 192 in Lalitpur and 109 in Bhaktapur.

In the past 24 hours, 499 new infections were recorded in Province 1, 26 in Province 2, 1,253 in Bagmati, 510 in Gandaki, 240 in Lumbini, 41 in Karnali and 47 in Sudurpaschim.

According to the data released by the ministry, 19 districts are home to more than 500 active cases each and 18 other districts host more than 200 active cases each.

On Wednesday, 796 individuals infected with the virus were being treated in intensive care units across the country. Another 184—55 in Province 1, 108 in Bagmati, one in Gandaki, 12 in Lumbini, two in Karnali and six in Sudurpaschim—were on ventilator support. Nepal on Tuesday reported 3,194 new coronavirus cases and 35 new deaths. Similarly, 2,609 new coronavirus cases and 22 deaths were recorded on Monday and 2,137 new coronavirus cases and 55 new deaths on Sunday.