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Rocket man' from TN becomes ISRO Chairman

For the first time in 55 years, a scientist from Tamil Nadu, K Sivan, who is nicknamed 'Rocket man' for his exploits with cryogenic engines, has been appointed as Chairman of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). In the last few decades, scientists from Kerala and Karnataka have predominantly occupied the most decorated post.



A view of Microsat, which will be flown as co-passenger onboard PSLV-C40 | Express

From the inception of ISRO in 1963, nine people had served as Chairman and the first being father of India's space programme Vikram Sarabhai, native of Ahmedabad and

served the organisation for nine years from 1963 to 1972. The others were MGK Menon (Karnataka), Satish Dhawan (J&K), UR Rao (Karnataka), K Kasturirangan (Kerala), G Madhavan Nair (Kerala), K Radhakrishnan (Kerala), Shailesh Nayak (Gujarat) and AS Kiran Kumar (Karnataka). Among all, Satish Dhawan was the longest serving Chairman for 12 years from 1972 to 1984 and the shortest stint was held by Shailesh Nayak, who was at the helm for just 12 days from January 1-12, 2015.

The Appointments Committee of Cabinet approved Sivan's appointment on Wednesday as Secretary, Department of Space and Chairman of Space Commission for a tenure of three years, an order issued by the personnel ministry said. He will be replacing incumbent Chairman AS Kiran Kumar, whose tenure will end on January 14.

Sivan, a native of Nagercoil in Kanniyakumari district, is currently the Director of Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), Trivandrum. He had played a pivotal role in ISRO's world recording breaking launch of 104 satellites in a single mission in February last year. He also led the Reusable Launch Vehicle (RLV) development program and spearheaded its design, qualification, aerodynamic characterisation and hardware development.

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A graduate from Madras Institute of Technology in Aeronautical engineering in 1980, Sivan took his ME in Aerospace engineering from IISc, Bengaluru, in 1982. Subsequently, he completed his PhD in Aerospace engineering from IIT, Bombay in 2006.

Reacting to the development, Sivan told Express that he was humbled by the appointment and his endeavour would be to strive harder to make space applications benefit the common man.

“We have got our task cut out with 2018 being the busiest year. This year, we have Chandrayaan-2 and second flight of GSLV MkIII, carrying the heaviest payload ever. We are planning a launch almost every month this year,” he said.

To a query, Sivan said he would take charge after Pongal festival. “It’s a big responsibility,”

Sivan, who was serving as director, Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thumba, since June 2015, said of his new assignment.

“Former chairmen such as G Madhavan Nair, K Radhakrishnan and outgoing chairman A S Kiran Kumar, took ISRO to new heights. It’s a big challenge to take on from there,” he said.

A Kanniyakumari native

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