



The launch of Bangladesh's first commercial satellite Bangabandhu-1 has been pushed to March, although its construction has been completed by the French manufacturer, owing to the packed schedule of the US launching station.

Initially, the government had planned to inaugurate the much talked about satellite in December so that it coincides with the 46th Victory Day celebrations.

An expert team from Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) led by its Chairman Shahjahan Mahmood recently visited Thales Alenia Space's factory in France and saw the complete structure of the satellite.

“We have seen different parts of the satellite ourselves and now it is on Thales's storage,” Mahmood told a meeting with members of Telecom Reporters' Network Bangladesh.

The satellite will be sent from France to Kennedy Space Centre in Florida one month ahead of the launch date.

Mahmood said a precise date has not been set yet but the probable launch could take place in March as per Thales's information.

A top official of the Bangabandhu Satellite Launch Project, requesting anonymity, said there is

a 95 percent chance that the launch would be carried out by March. If the date is missed, it would certainly be launched by the second week of April.

US firm Space Exploration Technologies Corporation (SpaceX) will use its Falcon 9 launch vehicle to launch Bangabandhu-1.

“The US firm has a very busy launching schedule. We asked SpaceX to use a new rocket to launch the satellite. It takes time to manage everything,” said the BTRC chief.

Earlier this year, Thales Alenia Space signed a deal with SpaceX to put Bangabandhu-1 into orbit using rocket carrier Falcon 9, a modern launch vehicle.

SpaceX is a private aerospace manufacturer and space transport services company that has worked with the NASA and transported cargo to the International Space Station.

The sophisticated and highly technical government project's estimated cost is Tk 2,967 crore.

Bangabandhu-1 is expected to provide services to all South Asian countries as well as Indonesia, the Philippines, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, if its frequency is properly coordinated, according to project documents.

Bangladesh currently meets its demand for satellite connectivity by renting bandwidth from foreign operators which costs the country about \$14 million a year. Once launched, Bangabandhu-1 will save the foreign currency.

The lifespan of the satellite will be 15 years, which will allow the country to earn \$1 billion by way of leasing out transponders and another \$1.5 billion by selling other services.

In November 2015, the BTRC signed a \$248-million deal with Thales Alenia Space to manufacture and launch the satellite.

Replying to a query, Mahmood said there is no chance that Bangabandhu-1 Satellite's service area would clash with the recently launched South Asian Satellite, which was designed, built and launched by India.

(Source - The Daily Star)