

# NASA says 49 debris from A-Sat test still in space, Indian missile expert slams report

By Surendra Singh

## HIGHLIGHTS:

- According to Nasa's latest orbital debris quarterly news, "A total of 101 debris have entered the public satellite catalog (database containing a list of objects in orbit), of which 49 fragments remain on orbit as of July 15"
- Missile expert and former DRDO scientist Ravi Gupta told TOI that the Nasa report "smells of a malicious propaganda against the country"

New Delhi: A latest report from US space agency National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) says around 49 pieces of debris from India's maiden anti-satellite test (A-Sat) in March are still roaming in space. The report drew flak from an Indian missile expert, who calls it 'malicious campaign against India'.

The A-Sat test, called "Mission Shakti", broke DRDO's Microsat-R satellite weighing 740-kg into hundreds of pieces of debris on March 27 that have since been tracked by the US Strategic Command. According to Nasa's latest orbital debris quarterly news, "At the time of breakup, over 400 fragments were initially tracked at approximately 294 x 265 km altitude by US Strategic Command's Space Surveillance Network (SSN). A total of 101 debris have entered the public satellite catalog (database containing a list of objects in orbit), of which 49 fragments remain on orbit as of July 15."



Missile expert and former DRDO scientist Ravi Gupta told TOI that the Nasa report "smells of a malicious propaganda against the country". "Why can't Nasa talk about the debris generated by its own country, Russia or China? These countries together had generated a large number of debris in space with their tests and satellite launches. Even if 49 pieces of debris are loitering around in the low-earth orbit, what are their size? Only if the debris are above 10cm in size can they be tracked by the US, not those smaller than that size. Secondly, if the debris are now around 100km altitude, they don't pose a danger to any spacecraft as most of the satellites, including International Space Station, are hovering between 400km and 1,000km altitude. "

Ravi Gupta said India is an emerging space power and giving a tough competition to countries in the space sector. He said the "US is not worried about space environment, but economics". According to a recent Morgan Stanley report, the global space industry would generate revenue of over \$1 trillion by 2040, up from current \$350 billion.

According to space-track website that tracks satellites and debris in space, India currently has 96 functional and non-functional satellites in space and 173 pieces of trackable debris, including fragments of rockets, generated from satellite launches. In comparison to India's 173 debris, the US has generated 4,804 debris, including rocket parts, and has 1,791 satellites, including non-operational ones, in space. There are currently total 14,520 debris, including rocket parts, and 5,165 functional and nonfunctional satellites in space, says the website.

In April, DRDO chairman G Satheesh Reddy had said that most of the debris generated from the test had decayed and the rest of it would dissipate in a "short period of time".

Soon after the test, former DRDO director general V K Saraswat while reacting to Nasa administrator Jim Bridenstine's statement that A-Sat test was a "terrible thing" had told TOI that it was a typical American response to India's progress. "The debris, generated below 300km will ultimately fall and burn out in Earth's atmosphere," Saraswat had said.

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