

# Making Sri Lanka a global space player

*Sri Lanka's **SupremeSAT** is looking to the launch of its first wholly-owned satellite as way to lift the country after a long and bitter civil war. SatelliteFinance's Jason Rainbow talks to chief commercial officer Nilakshi Abeynayake to find out more about its plans to play a vital role in the global space industry.*

**Jason Rainbow:** SupremeSAT ordered its first wholly-owned satellite (SupremeSAT 2) in 2013, but it has ambitions to become one of the largest satellite operators in South Asia. Could you tell me more about that?

**Nilakshi Abeynayake:** It is our pride to have become the most active privately-owned space company in the region.

Yes, our goal is to become the largest satellite operator of South Asia and then to reach for a considerable global market share.

Our business plan not only covers satellite capacity, but also reaches out to make Sri Lanka a regional hub for space-related activities.

This was why we have spent millions of dollars and built a sophisticated teleport which will be unveiled as "South Asian Space Academy" soon.

Contribution to the development of space industry to benefit mankind is our group's CSR initiative. Hence the South Asia Space Academy will soon be equipped to cater to space industry related research, development and training.

**JR:** What time frame has it set to become South Asia's largest satellite operator?

**NA:** Having already secured 90% of Sri Lanka's market share with the jointly owned satellite and dedicated satellite capacity, the time



**Jason Rainbow**  
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**Supreme SAT's chief commercial officer Nilakshi Abeynayake**

frame for regional expansion is set to be within the next three to four years.

**JR:** Will SupremeSAT look to order further fully-owned satellites, or could you instead seek to acquire capacity on other satellites – as the group did with ChinaSat-12 (SupremeSAT 1)?

**NA:** Our current focus is to launch our fully-owned satellite SupremeSAT 2 successfully into orbit.

We do understand the necessity of having multiple assets in different orbital slots to strengthen our journey.

So, the answer is yes. All going well, we for sure will not stop with SupremeSAT 2.

**JR:** How will the company finance these expansion plans – will it look to use the debt markets?

**NA:** At this stage we are self-sufficient – with EXIM related financing, intra-group funding and revenues generated from the pre-sold capacity. However with time, we will look to use the debt market and will seek the

expertise of our legal advisers, Milbank, for the same.

**JR:** Are there options in your existing CGWIC contract for the in-orbit delivery of SupremeSAT 2 that you could use for future satellites? Or will you run a competitive international process for future spacecraft?

**NA:** No, the current in-orbit-delivery contract covers only SupremeSAT 2 project.

Future projects will be open for other manufacturers as well and will surely be governed by a internationally run competitive process.

**JR:** Sources have told SatelliteFinance that SupremeSAT is looking to acquire an orbital slot from a "globally renowned, listed satellite company" for SupremeSAT 2, after difficulty in obtaining rights to Sri Lanka's 50E position. This has also pushed back the planned launch of SupremeSAT 2 from mid-2016 to the end of 2017. Can you say anything about that?

**NA:** Yes. The launch plan did undergo a setback due to the commercial/technical reasons pertinent to the right orbital slot. However, we are now working on getting this well structured in partnership with a well reputed space company.

Unfortunately, the confidentiality agreement we have with them restricts me from divulging any further information with regard to this.

But be assured we are making good progress towards meeting the rescheduled launch plan.

**JR:** Have you sold, or are you looking to sell, any of the satellite's capacity?

**NA:** Our marketing efforts will be to sell only around 60%. The rest has already been pre-sold.

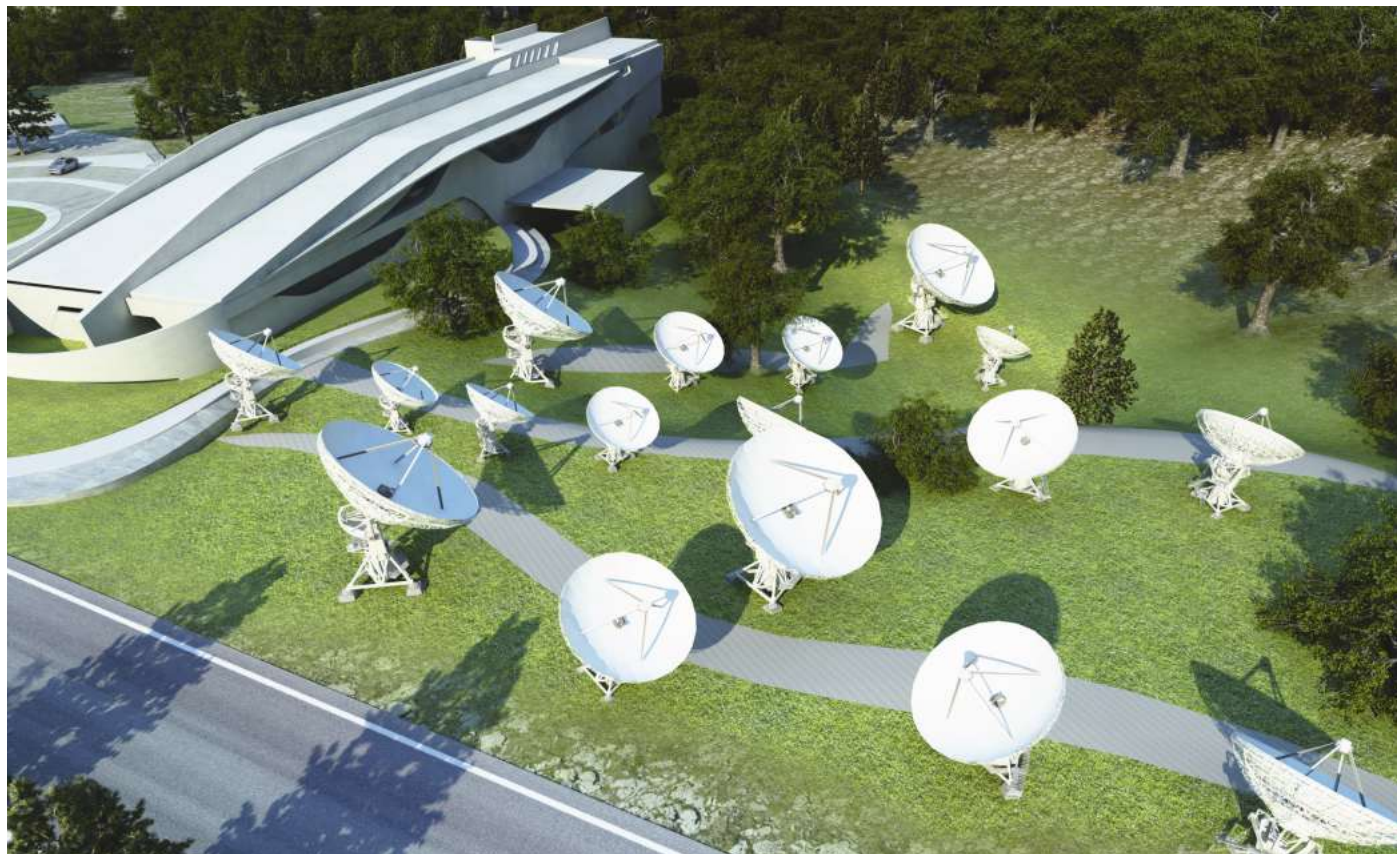
**JR:** Did Chinese banks help fund the satellite? What kind of export credit agency support did it get?

**NA:** I must commend the support and assistance given by China Great Wall Industry

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Aerial view of the Kandy Teleport and Proposed Space Academy

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Corporation from the inception of our project. They were a strength to us both commercially and technically, and played an integral part of our success.

The funding support is from the Export Credit Agency and China Great Wall Industry Corporation is currently playing a big role in structuring the same.

**JR: Does SupremeSAT need to raise funds prior to SupremeSAT 2's delayed launch towards the end of 2017?**

NA: No.

**JR: Bangladesh and Myanmar have recently moved closer to ordering their first satellites, with Nepal, Maldives and Afghanistan also looking into it in recent years. How concerned are you about over capacity in the region?**

NA: We have been continuously witnessing various governments making statements about launching their own satellites in the recent past.

However, as a company that has had unprecedented growth in a very short span of time, we are well aware that it takes huge capital investment, creativity, innovation, appetite for high risk to venture into and succeed in the space business.

It is very rare that these salient features being built in any state-owned institutes that claim that they have plans to launch satellites. It is my humble opinion that developing countries must leave the space industry to private entrepreneurs instead of betting on this high risk industry with public money, which is better used for the benefit of their nations.

**JR: How involved is SupremeSAT in India's plans for a dual communications/meteorological satellite for the SAAARC region?**

NA: India is more than a neighbour to Sri Lanka. Our links with India dates back several millennia and our relationship with them is truly multifarious.

As a business entity, we look up to India for guidance, technical assistance and cooperation. We are glad to have established

a dialogue with Antrix Corporation. We hope to explore all avenues of cooperation with them in the near future.

**JR: Is there anything else you would like to add?**

NA: Though we are a relatively young private company, we took a daring step with our investment in the post-war development era.

Our intention is to make Sri Lanka emerge as a global player in the space arena – not only for our own commercial gains, but also to give the long-awaited hope and confidence to 22 million people who very badly needed such encouraging ventures to gain self confidence, and also to believe that they are now back on the world map, with an ability to do things which are second to none.

As much as our satellite fleet is important, we also consider our Teleport cum Space Academy to play a vital role in the global space industry.

This is where our South Asian Space Academy will play a big role. You will soon witness this mega facility located in Kandy, Sri Lanka, becoming a regionally recognised space related research, development and training academy, which will rally all Asian space enthusiasts and institutions to march proud in the global space race.

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