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IN-SPACE Opens the LVM3, India's Most Capable Rocket, to the Private Sector

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WHY IN NEWS

IN-SPACe, India's space-sector regulator and promoter, has invited an **Expression of Interest** to transfer the technology of the **LVM3 (Launch Vehicle Mark-3), India's most capable operational launch vehicle**, to a private firm. The transfer will include the full technology package and ISRO support over a defined period, marking a landmark step in opening rocket-building to industry. It is the **second and bigger step after the earlier PSLV technology transfer** (to an HAL-L&T consortium), escalating privatisation from the workhorse PSLV to ISRO's most capable launcher.

*the LVM3 is often called India's "heavy-lift" rocket, but it is technically a **medium-lift / medium-to-heavy class vehicle** (carrying about 4 tonnes to geostationary transfer orbit and 8 to 10 tonnes to low-earth orbit). It is ISRO's heaviest operational launcher, not a "heavy-lift" vehicle in the strict technical sense.*

WHAT IS BEING OFFERED

ASPECT	DETAIL
Vehicle	LVM3 (Launch Vehicle Mark-3), nicknamed "Bahubali"
Offer	Full technology transfer to a private firm
Support	ISRO hand-holding for up to about 42 months (or two LVM3 launches)
Process	Expression of Interest by IN-SPACe
Significance	Rocket-building moves to the private sector

The Scale of the Opportunity

ELEMENT	DETAIL
Pipeline	Government approval for 60-plus LVM3 rockets to be built via the PPP model
Value	A commercial opportunity of about Rs 25,000 crore over 12 to 14 years
Eligibility	Average annual turnover above Rs 800 crore (in 3 of the last 5 years) or a valuation of at least Rs 2,000 crore , with 7-plus years of operational experience

The high thresholds signal that this is aimed at large aerospace conglomerates or consortia, not startups.

UNDERSTANDING THE LVM3

ASPECT	DETAIL
Role	ISRO's most capable operational launch vehicle
Nickname	"Bahubali"
Payload	~4 tonnes to GTO; ~8 to 10 tonnes to LEO
Launch site	Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR, Sriharikota
Key missions	Chandrayaan-2 and Chandrayaan-3; the OneWeb commercial launches; the planned Gaganyaan human spaceflight

The Three Stages

STAGE	DETAIL
S200	Two large solid strap-on boosters
L110	Liquid core stage powered by twin Vikas engines
C25	Cryogenic upper stage with the indigenous CE-20 engine , a key self-reliance milestone (cryogenic technology was once denied to India)

The LVM3's reliability on high-profile missions, including the Chandrayaan-3 Moon landing, makes it the natural candidate for private production to meet growing launch demand.

THE SPACE-SECTOR REFORMS

This step is part of India's broader opening of the space sector.

ELEMENT	DETAIL
Department of Space (DoS)	The apex body overseeing India's space programme
ISRO	The national space agency, focused on R&D and exploration
IN-SPACe	Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre: the single-window regulator and promoter that authorises and enables private space activity
NSIL	NewSpace India Limited, ISRO's commercial arm (Antrix was the earlier one)
Indian Space Policy, 2023	Defined the roles of these bodies and opened the sector further
FDI	Up to 100% FDI now allowed in parts of the space sector (2024 liberalisation)

By transferring rocket-building to industry, ISRO can focus on advanced research and exploration, **Gaganyaan, the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (planned by 2035), Chandrayaan-4 and interplanetary missions**, while private firms scale up routine launches, the model used by leading spacefaring nations.

Why Now, and the Risks

The "why now" is a launch-demand backlog and a booming commercial-satellite market that ISRO alone cannot serve while pursuing its exploration roadmap. India's space economy, around **\$8.4 billion (about 2% of the global market)**, is targeted to reach roughly **\$44 billion by 2033 (about 8%)**.

But the move is not risk-free, and a balanced view must weigh:

- **Technology-absorption risk:** can a private firm master a complex cryogenic launcher quickly and safely?
- **Single-vendor risk:** the high eligibility thresholds may leave just one conglomerate, reducing competition.
- **IP and terms:** the conditions of technology transfer and intellectual property need to protect national interest.
- **ISRO capacity:** transferring talent and attention to industry must not drain ISRO's own core capability.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Prelims

- **IN-SPACE** invited an Expression of Interest to transfer the **LVM3** to a private firm (following the earlier **PSLV** transfer)
- **LVM3** = Launch Vehicle Mark-3, “Bahubali”; ISRO’s most capable launcher (medium-to-heavy class; ~4t to GTO, ~8-10t to LEO)
- Stages: **S200** boosters, **L110** (Vikas), **C25** cryogenic (**indigenous CE-20** engine); launched from **SDSC SHAR, Sriharikota**
- LVM3 launched **Chandrayaan-2 and -3** and **OneWeb**, and is planned for **Gaganyaan**
- Pipeline: **60-plus LVM3** via PPP, about **Rs 25,000 crore**; **Indian Space Policy 2023**; **100% FDI** allowed
- **IN-SPACE** (regulator/promoter), **NSIL** (commercial arm), **ISRO** (R&D), **DoS** (apex)

Mains Angles

- ① **GS3 Science and Technology:** “Privatising the LVM3 boosts launch capacity but carries real risks.” Critically examine the single-vendor, technology-absorption and IP concerns.
- ② **GS3 Economy:** Discuss India’s space-sector reforms and the goal of raising India’s share of the global space economy from ~2% to ~8% by 2033.
- ③ **GS3 Self-Reliance:** Analyse how a public-private division of labour lets ISRO focus on exploration (Gaganyaan, the space station) while industry handles routine launches.

FACTS CORNER

FACT	DETAIL
Vehicle	LVM3 (“Bahubali”); ISRO’s most capable launcher (~4t GTO / ~8-10t LEO)
Stages	S200 boosters, L110 (Vikas), C25 cryogenic (indigenous CE-20)
Action	Full technology transfer; follows the PSLV transfer
Scale	60-plus rockets, ~Rs 25,000 cr, over 12-14 years
ISRO support	Up to about 42 months / two launches
Key missions	Chandrayaan-2 and -3, OneWeb, Gaganyaan
Space bodies	DoS (apex), ISRO (R&D), IN-SPACe (regulator), NSIL (commercial)
Policy / FDI	Indian Space Policy 2023; up to 100% FDI; economy ~\$8.4bn to \$44bn (2033)

Sources: *IN-SPACe, ISRO, Deccan Chronicle*

Source: IN-SPACe Opens the LVM3, India's Most Capable Rocket, to the Private Sector — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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