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G Madhavan Nair becomes first non-American president to head IAA

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PANAJI: Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) chairperson G Madhavan Nair has been elected as the next president of the International Academy of Astronautics (IAA), and will be the first non-American to head the organisation fifty years after it was set up.

The announcement came at the inaugural function of the five-day Eight International Conference on Low Cost Planetary Missions (LCPMs) being convened in Goa, and was made by the IAA's secretary general Jean Mitchell Contant.

"This is the first time a non-American will become president in 50 years of the IAA's existence," he said.

The election were conducted through a postal ballot as the IAA has a membership spanning 94 countries. The announcement also came as a surprise to many, as the formal announcement was to be made at the

International Astronautical Congress which is to be held in Korea in October.

Nair said that the announcement came as a pleasant surprise. "India has a strong presence in the IAA and has contributed significantly. I consider this as a recognition of the good work put in by the Indian members," he said.

"India has a heritage of looking at the stars. Even 1,000 years before Galileo invented the telescope, Aryabhata in 500 A.D. wrote on lunar cycles. Our scientists are as good as any in the world," he added.

The Isro chairperson will take over the post of IAA president in October, and will have a term of two years.

IAA was founded in Sweden's capital Stockholm on August 16, 1960. The Academy's beginning was led by Dr Theodore von Karman, an important figure in the evolution of rocketry, and the IAA's first president. Others who followed him as IAA's presidents were Stark Draper (1967-1982), George E Mueller (1982-1997), Michael Yarmoych (1997-2003) and Edward Stone (2003-2009).

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