Successful launch of Spainsat

Spain/French Guiana

Space Systems/Loral (SS/L), a subsidiary of Loral Space & Communications, announced that the SPAINSAT satellite, manufactured for HISDESAT Servicios Estrategicos S.A. (HISDESAT) of Madrid, was successfully launched at 2:32 pm Pacific Standard Time on the 11th March. The satellite was lofted into space aboard an Ariane 5 ECA rocket from Arianespace's spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana.

"The completion and launch of SPAINSAT is the culmination of a successful partnership between SS/L, HISDESAT, XTAR and the Spanish aerospace industry," said Patrick DeWitt, President, Space Systems/Loral (SS/L). "Government demand for bandwidth has clearly increased in recent years and with SPAINSAT, SS/L has leveraged its successful and reliable 1300 commercial satellite platform for use as a powerful communications system, able to provide robust government and military satellite services."

SPAINSAT carries a total of 13 wide-band, high-power X-band transponders. The satellite also carries a specially designed Ka-band payload uniquely tailored to provide services to the Spanish Ministry of Defense (MoD). SPAINSAT has a specified service life of 15 years and will maintain station-keeping and orbital stability by using bipropellant propulsion and momentum-bias control systems.

From its 30 degrees West longitude orbital location, SPAINSAT's coverage area encompasses a region extending from Denver in the United States to the South American and African continents and across the Atlantic to the Middle East. It carries a number of steerable spot beams that can be positioned anywhere within the satellite's footprint. SPAINSAT is designed to be compatible with existing X-band terminals, including dishes under 2.4 meters.

"SPAINSAT is the first satellite dedicated to Spain's ever-expanding need for satellite communications services," said Miguel Angel Primo, Chief Operating Officer (COO), HISDESAT. "With SPAINSAT, HISDESAT and its partner XTAR will be able to provide an expanded array of X-band services to the Spanish Ministry of Defense, the US and other allied countries. HISDESAT will also provide Spain with a dedicated Ka-band platform on SPAINSAT for developing new, enhanced communications capabilities." □

GlobeCast delivers ESPN Classic

UK

ESPN Inc, the world's leading multinational, multimedia sports entertainment company, has struck a deal with GlobeCast – a global content management and delivery company - to deliver ESPN Classic, the company's first UK-dedicated sports channel, to the Sky Digital platform. Launched using GlobeCast's capacity on the Eurobird satellite, ESPN Classic is devoted entirely to the greatest moments and legends of sport with a mix of all-time classic highlights, matches, movies, interviews, profiles and documentaries. GlobeCast's solution for ESPN includes connectivity from the broadcaster's playout facility in West London to GlobeCast, where the feed is encoded, multiplexed then sent to GlobeCast's Brookmans Park teleport for uplink to the Sky Digital platform using GlobeCast's Eurobird capacity.

ESPN Classic is available 24 hours a day on Sky's EPG channel 442.

GlobeCast has an established relationship with ESPN Classic, providing a content and delivery services for the channel's existing French, Italian and European feeds via Astra at 19.2 degrees East, Hotbird at 13 degrees East and Sirius 2 4.8 degrees East respectively. □

Romania's Euforia lifestyle TV launch transmissions from W2

Euforia lifestyle TV has started broadcasting through W2 for distribution to cable headends and over-the-air transmitters in Romania. The channel's arrival on W2 boosts the total number of Romanian channels broadcasting from 16 degrees East to 10, reinforcing Eutelsat's 10 degrees East location as the key video neighbourhood in Romania. Romania's national broadcaster already transmits six television channels Antena 1, Antena 2, TVR1, TVR2, TVR International, TVR Cultural, National TV, N24 and Favorit TV. □

Express-AM11 spacecraft failure

Russia

On 29 March, the Express-AM11 satellite located at 96.5 East orbital slot had an accident. According to the preliminary finding of the NPO PM spacecraft manufacturer the telemetry information showed that due to a sudden external impact an instantaneous depressurization of the thermal control system fluid circuit had happened, followed by a sudden outburst of the heat-carrying agent.

This resulted in a disturbing moment generation followed by the spacecraft orientation loss and rotation. RSCC downloaded its backup capacities on the east orbital arc and Television (TV) and Radio broadcasting was restored. All communications channels of a state importance have been transferred to the Express-A2 (103 East), Express-AM2 (80 East), and Express-AM3 (140 East) satellites. □

SRG SSR doubles capacity on Eutelsat while NTV-Plus expands resource on Eutelsat W4

Regional

Eutelsat Communications and SRG SSR have announced the signature of a new satellite capacity contract at Eutelsat's HOT BIRD™ video neighbourhood. The new contract concerns a 33MHz transponder on the HOT BIRD™ 7A satellite, which was launched on 11 March by an Ariane 5 ECA booster. This new lease doubles the capacity used by Switzerland's public broadcasting organisation, which has been transmitting via a transponder on Eutelsat's HOT BIRD™ 3 satellite since 1997.

SRG SSR's selection of HOT BIRD™ 7A supports its objective to drive the switchover from analogue to a fully digital broadcasting environment and to provide high quality reception and immediate coverage to 100 per cent of Swiss homes.

By increasing its satellite resources, SRG SSR is substantially improving the quality of the images it broadcasts, doubling the bitrate of its video signals to deliver DVD quality to all Swiss homes via cable or Direct-To-Home (DTH). Today, 80 per cent of Switzerland's 3.5 million television homes are cabled and 300,000 are equipped for DTH reception. The phasing-out of analogue terrestrial TV should increase the number of satellite DTH homes to 500,000.

Due the particularities of Switzerland's Alpine environment, satellite has played an important role in the country's public television network for feeding cable headends and directly serving homes beyond cable. Satellite reception of the seven Swiss public television channels and 16 radio stations is free but encrypted in order to limit access to Swiss territory. Within this framework the SRG SSR Group, which brings together the three regional arms of Swiss public television, has taken end-to-end charge of the audiovisual broadcasting chain, from content gathering to distribution of smartcards to the general public.

On the occasion of the contract signature Hans Strassmann, Technical Director of SRG SSR said: "By doubling satellite bandwidth at our disposal we can execute our strategy of delivering quality by improving image performance and we can also prepare for the introduction of Dolby sound and associated digital services using the MHP multimedia platform. Eutelsat's HOT BIRD™ 3 and HOT BIRD™ 7A satellites will broadcast the complete portfolio of SRG SSR television and radio channels in a single platform".

"Eutelsat is already a partner in the roll-out of Digital Terrestrial Television in France, Italy and the UK. By feeding terrestrial networks and complementing coverage through direct-to-home satellite reception, this new contract with SRG SSR underscores the dual role that our satellites can play in digital switchover for public and private broadcasters in Europe," affirmed Giuliano Berretta, Eutelsat CEO. "Primary distribution of television broadcasts to over-the-air transmitters and cable headends constitutes an important activity for Eutelsat which is benefiting from the current dynamic in DTT deployment. Today, fixed and mobile broadband networks are creating new opportunities perfectly suited to satellites which have a strong role to play in feeding headends and providing universal coverage whether for content delivery to 140cm screens or mobile phones with screens 30 times smaller."

In separate news, Eutelsat Communications has announced that NTV-Plus, Russia's leading DTH pay-TV platform, is boosting its capacity on Eutelsat's W4 satellite from six to eight transponders. The new agreement for high-power capacity on Eutelsat's W4 satellite has been concluded between NTV Plus and the Russian Satellite Communications Company (RSCC), Russia's national satellite communications operator and a longstanding partner with Eutelsat in the Russian market.

The new capacity will be used by NTV-Plus to expand its pay-TV platform which was launched in 1997 and today serves 450,000 subscriber homes, mainly located in Russia, through Eutelsat's W4 satellite. Since the beginning of March three new television channels (NTV-Plus Tennis, NTV-Plus Sport Classic, Nash Football) have already joined the existing offer of 60 digital channels. Up to 20 further channels are planned for launch in the coming months. □

Loral Skynet re-enters US nmarket

US

Loral Skynet has announced that as of 18 March 2006, it has resumed offering Fixed Satellite Services (FSS) to customers in North America.

"Having the ability to once again offer our FSS services in North America is a major milestone in Skynet's growth strategy," said Patrick Brant, President of Loral Skynet. "Most of Skynet's history and consistent reputation for superior customer service has been as an FSS provider in the US. We intend to vigorously market our heritage services in this newly available region, in addition to providing our successful IP-focused network services."

Pursuant to the terms of Loral's agreement to sell certain of its North American assets to Intelsat in March 2004, Skynet was precluded from offering basic FSS capacity leasing services in North America for two years. Brant continued: "Loral Skynet operates a global satellite fleet, now offering complete bandwidth services in every major geographic region. With the resumption of service in North America, Skynet's portfolio of satellite services offers customers complete global communications services, from basic capacity leases to the latest in IP-powered hybrid satellite and terrestrial network services." □

Arena to use SES ASTRA

Germany

SES ASTRA and Arena, owner of live-TV rights for the German first soccer league (Bundesliga), have announced that they have signed a satellite capacity agreement. The long term contract secures Arena the capacity of a full digital transponder on an ASTRA satellite at the prime orbital position 19.2 degrees East. With its seven satellites at this position, SES ASTRA can reach more than 16 million German households which receive their TV programmes directly via satellite of which more than 6 million use the digital reception mode. The parties are not disclosing the financial details of the agreement.

"With Arena, we have gained an important and prominent new customer", said Ferdinand Kayser, President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SES ASTRA. "We are pleased that ASTRA households will be able to benefit from the Bundesliga package that Arena will offer. We are looking forward to a long-standing and successful relationship with our new customer."

"ASTRA's reach means that Arena will be available via satellite across Germany. We are continuing to work with technology providers to assemble the remaining elements of a satellite platform", said Arena and Unity Media CEO Parm Sandhu. □

SES AMERICOM and NDS ink deal to provide IP-PRIME with IPTV content protection software

US

Enabling telephone companies (telcos) of all sizes to securely and cost effectively deliver television programming to the home, SES AMERICOM has announced an agreement with NDS to provide end-to-end Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) content protection aboard SES AMERICOM's IP-PRIME distribution platform. The alliance represents a key component of the turnkey, IP-PRIME solution, which allows telcos to deliver on the dream of the triple play and programmers to guard against unauthorized access to material.

As part of the agreement, NDS, a leading provider of digital pay TV technology, is integrating its VideoGuard conditional access and Synamedia IPTV software into the IP-PRIME network, a centralized, satellite-delivered IP television delivery system that permits telcos to bundle traditional standard and High Defintion (HD) television programming on a single line with their voice and broadband services. The combination of the NDS VideoGuard and Synamedia encryption and security capabilities provide protection - from origination at the SES AMERICOM IPTV Broadcast Center in Vernon Valley, New Jersey, to authorized telco video hubs, all the way to the IP set-top box and throughout a communications network in the home.

"The secure delivery of IP-PRIME-enabled IPTV content has turned the long-awaited triple play vision into a viable and compelling business for a broad range of telcos and programmers," explained Alan Young, Chief Technology Officer (CTO) for SES AMERICOM. "The proven security technologies from NDS are playing a key role in the distribution of hundreds of popular, quality television channels over a single protected line to the home."

"Telecommunications companies have long shown great interest in the delivery of television services to the home, and by working with SES AMERICOM and its innovative IP-PRIME solution we're helping to make the vision of a true triple play a powerful reality for large and small telco providers throughout the US," said Dr. Dov Rubin, vice President and General Manager, NDS Americas. "This integrated offering can provide a turnkey approach for telephone companies, bringing television services to their subscribers - quickly, easily, and securely."

BellSouth and the National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative (NRTC), which serves rural and independent telcos in a market of more than ten million homes, are currently in varying stages of IP-PRIME trials. NDS joins an impressive list of technology partners aboard the IP-PRIME platform, including Scientific-Atlanta, selected to provide an MPEG-4 encoding system and its ROSA Network Management System. Globecomm Systems is providing the overall design and integration services as well as the major components for the IPTV broadcast distribution centre.

IP-PRIME is scheduled for commercial launch later this year, with hundreds of standard and HD television channels available for telco subscribers across the US. □

SCOTTY wins Eurocopter order for satcom

Austria

SCOTTY has announced that Eurocopter has ordered ten sets of the SCOTTY Aero Mission Gear. This is the first part of a roll out which is expected to contain 20 complete setups and 20 base installations. The rollout of the remaining sets is expected to follow and to be delivered in this year.

This communication solution has been co-developed with Eurocopter for the CH-53 fleet which Eurocopter is currently upgrading for the German military. The SCOTTY Aero Mission Gear offers satellite based video and data communication during flight in the helicopter.

SCOTTY received "preferred supplier" status from Eurocopter in December 2004. The development of the system in conjunction with Eurocopter and German military took until September 2005 when, after successful trials, the end-user approved the system. Eurocopter is one of the main suppliers of civilian and military helicopters worldwide. It currently manufactures approximately 400 helicopters a year and has delivered thousands of helicopters to date.

Thilo Lees, the project manager at Eurocopter for this project, states: "Eurocopter has found with SCOTTY a preferred supplier of communication equipment which enhances our product portfolio. We expect SCOTTY solutions to be integrated not only for the CH-53 programme with the German Military but also for other types of helicopters and for many of our other customers."

The SCOTTY development team designed a unique platform for this order. The SCOTTY Aero Mission Gear is a valuable enhancement for both helicopters and aeroplanes and has wide potential applications. Current integration project negotiations do include lightweight twin-engine multi-role military helicopters, small fixed-wing and helicopter UAV aircraft. SCOTTY is the exclusive partner of EMS Satcom, Canada, for this type of Aero-Satcom installations.

EMS SATCOM customised a radome for the tracking antenna that is designed to maintain total functionality while also allowing the tail rotors to be folded. The EMS SATCOM eNfusion HSD (high-speed data) terminal, a part of the kit, enables a combined connection for video, data, and voice of up to 256kbit/s, using Inmarsat's Swift64 service.

SCOTTY designed the communications network onboard the CH-53G, delivering TEMPEST video and data conferencing hardware, securing interoperability with the encryption environment, and integrating everything together in an aero-certified rack which can be rolled on and off the helicopter. It is the only system worldwide that can be rapidly moved from one aircraft to another, securing reconnaissance flight readiness with less than one hour's installation time. □

BP selects Telenor

Global

Telenor Satellite Services, a subsidiary of Telenor of Norway has announced the signing of a three-year communications agreement with British Petroleum (BP) for global broadband services over satellite.

The two-part agreement, including Telenor land-based and Sealink at-sea broadband communications services, is one of the largest of its kind in terms of numbers of sites, vessels and systems included.

The contract establishes the terms and conditions for upgrading the communications systems of ships and production facilities, as determined by BP, and has the potential of providing cost-efficient and highly reliable Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) equipment and services to BP's entire fleet. □