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The *Sea Launch Commander* and the *Odyssey* Launch Platform, have departed Sea Launch Home Port in Long Beach, Calif., in preparation for the launch of the Thuraya-1 satellite on Oct. 18.

The Sea Launch vessels will travel approximately 3,000 miles to the launch site, located in open waters of the Pacific Ocean on the Equator, at 154 degrees West Longitude. Upon arrival, the Sea Launch team will initiate a 72-hour countdown to liftoff. The 45-minute launch window will open at 11:00 p.m. (Pacific Daylight Time) on Oct. 18.

This fifth mission for Sea Launch will serve as a milestone for high performance to geosynchronous transfer orbit. At 5,108 kg. (11,260 lb.), the Thuraya-1 satellite is the heaviest payload to date on Sea Launch's Zenit-3SL rocket. It is also the Middle East region's first mobile telecommunications satellite.

"We were very pleased to be selected to launch the Thuraya satellite," said Will Trafton, president of Sea Launch. "Once in operation, this satellite will advance communications services for a broad region of people and cultures. To have the opportunity to work with Thuraya in helping to contribute to the lives of so many people is very significant for us."

Designed for a 12-year lifespan, Thuraya-1 will be positioned in a geosynchronous orbit at 44 degrees East Longitude, inclined at 6.3 degrees, 35,786 km (22,236 miles) above the Earth. Boeing Satellite Systems (formerly Hughes Space and Communications) built the HS-GEM (geosynchronous-mobile) model spacecraft in El Segundo, Calif. The ground segment includes terrestrial gateways plus a co-located network operations center and a satellite control facility in the United Arab Emirates.

"Our decision to select Sea Launch was made after careful study. We are confident that deployment of our satellite using Sea Launch presents the best scenario for Thuraya," said Yousuf Al Sayed, chief executive of Thuraya Satellite Telecommunications Company, based in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

When the satellite becomes operational in 2001, Thuraya will offer regional mobile coverage to 99 countries spanning the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, central Asia, north and central Africa and Europe. Thuraya's cost-effective and satellite-enhanced services will use dual-mode (satellite and Global System for Mobile Communications/GSM) handsets, as well as fixed, vehicular and payphone terminals. Services and features include telephone, data, fax, messages and GPS (Global Positioning System), in addition to GSM amenities.

Sea Launch provides commercial satellite customers the most direct and cost-effective route to geosynchronous transfer orbit. From the ocean-based launch site, the robust Sea Launch Zenit-3SL rocket can lift a heavier spacecraft mass or place a payload into a higher perigee, helping satellite operators attain a longer satellite service capability. For more information, visit the Sea Launch website.

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