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Amid row, uncertainty looms over Isro chief's autobiography release

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NEW DELHI: Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) chairperson S Somanath has withheld the release of his autobiography, which was earlier scheduled for later this week, after a controversy erupted over some of his reportedly critical remarks about his predecessor K Sivan.

"The intention was not to create a controversy or to target any individual," Somanath said. "The book will not be launched as planned. I will take a decision on it later."

The excerpts of his autobiography in Malayalam, *Nikavu Kudicha Simhagal* (translated as Lions that drank the Moon), which were released over the weekend in a Kerala newspaper, suggested Sivan allegedly caused hinderance in Somanath's promotion as his



S Somanath

successor. Somanath, however, said: "I have not said in the book that Dr Sivan prevented me from becoming Isro chairperson."

The excerpts also reportedly highlighted Somanath's discomfort with Sivan's decision not to disclose the reasons behind the Chandrayaan-2 mission's failure in landing on the lunar surface.

On September 2, 2019, the lander module of Chandrayaan-2 successfully detached from the orbiter, to commence the final journey before attempting to land on the surface of the Moon. On

September 7, however, the space agency fell short as the Vikram lander crashed on the lunar surface. While the mission didn't achieve its intended end, eight equipment onboard orbiter has been providing crucial data since.

The failure analysis report prepared by Isro highlighted that the five engines used for the reduction of velocity of the Vikram lander developed a higher thrust than intended. The intention was for the Vikram lander to lose most of its velocity by the time it was around 400 metres from the lunar surface and start the process of hovering above the intended landing site to ensure a soft vertical descent. The high velocity, however, caused it to crash on the moon's surface. In the successful Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft, the engines for velocity reduction were downsized.