

Ecuador satellite hits Soviet-era space junk (Update)

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A tiny Ecuadoran satellite that collided in space with the remains of a Soviet rocket survived the crash, but was damaged and is not transmitting, Quito's space agency said Thursday.

Ecuador's space agency EXA had warned on Wednesday that a space fender-bender was likely between its "Pegaso" (Pegasus) nanosatellite and the remains of an S14 rocket launched by the Soviet Union into space in 1985, in the midst of the Cold War.

The agency's director Ronnie Nader said in a Twitter message that US space officials confirmed Pegaso had suffered only a glancing blow from the space debris.

"It was a not a direct hit," tweeted Nader, Ecuador's first and only astronaut. "Pegasus remains in orbit."

He added that despite the collision, which occurred around 0538 GMT some 1,500 kilometers (930 miles) above the east coast of Madagascar, the satellite seemed to be holding its course.

Later data indicated that the nanosatellite—a cube measuring just 10 by 10 by 75 centimeters (four by four by 30 inches), not counting its solar panels, and weighing 1.2 kilograms (2.6 pounds)—actually struck tiny debris in the particle cloud surrounding the Soviet space junk.

The EXA said that the satellite's antenna had "lost its orientation and the

craft is spinning wildly over two of its axes, so it cannot currently receive transmissions or send commands."

Ecuadoran engineers will not know whether they can get Pegaso to work again until Monday, according to EXA.

Nader earlier said that the nanosatellite is insured, without revealing for how much.

Pegaso—the first satellite designed and built in Ecuador—set off aboard an unmanned rocket April 25 from the Jiuquand station in northern China. On May 16, it transmitted its first live video with audio.

Last month's launch came amid much fanfare, including a live broadcast.

Ecuador plans to send a second satellite into space from Russia in July.

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