

# PM adds twin goals to India's space odyssey

Send 1st Indian to the Moon by 2040, set up space station by 2035, says Modi; private sector senses big opportunity

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**O**n Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi added two new goals to the country's space ambitions: set up an Indian space station by 2035, and send the first Indian to the Moon by 2040.

The domestic space industry was quick to welcome the move, indicating that the new targets will not only see big investments but also enhance the private sector's role in the Indian space ecosystem.

Modi stated the objections during a meeting to review the preparedness of the Gaganyaan mission (the country's first human mission) and the first demonstration flight of the crew escape system test vehicle scheduled for October 21, close on the heels of India's success with the lunar exploration mission, Chandrayaan-3.

According to a statement, Modi said India should target a "Bharatiya Antariksha Station" (Indian space station) by 2035 and send the first Indian to the Moon by 2040.

"The advantage with India is that it is number one in cost efficiency. This will be an important goal for the private sector, too, to come up with new technologies and contribute to a joint ecosystem with the government," said Pawan Kumar Chandana, co-founder of Skyroot Aerospace, a startup that developed Vikram-S, India's first privately developed rocket launched this year.

"Till now, we have done rockets, satellites and more. Human missions were the area where India was lagging behind. Putting a man on the Moon will be the next level. The Indian space station will be a stepping stone towards that," he added.

India's plan for a space station comes at a time when the US space agency, Nasa, has already announced plans to decommission the International Space Station in 2031. The Prime Minister reportedly out-



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lined the future of India's space exploration endeavours and urged scientists to work towards interplanetary missions, including a Venus Orbiter Mission and a Mars Lander.

"A commitment to setting up a space station by 2035 and sending an Indian astronaut to the Moon by 2040 will unmistakably bring space technology to the forefront," said Awais Ahmed, founder and chief executive officer of Pixxel, a Bengaluru-based space technology startup. "This will catalyse significant technological advancements in space exploration and related fields. Moreover, it will create extensive opportunities for research, generate employment, and stimulate public interest," he added.

"Building a space station is

a key step to enable the Indian Space Research Organisation's stellar space talent to do more ambitious research. At the same time, this is going to be vital for private players like us, as it's going to act as a test bed for launching CubeSats (miniature satellites), conducting space bio-research, and much more," said Suyash Singh, co-founder and chief executive officer of GalaxEye.

"We believe today's announcement will pave the way for private space players to contribute to growing developments in the sector in India," said A K Bhatt, director general of the Indian Space Association.

The Department of Space will create a road map for Moon exploration. "This will encompass a series of Chandrayaan missions, the development of a Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV), construction of a new launch pad, setting up human-centric laboratories, and associated technologies," the statement said.

The Department of Space presented an overview of the Gaganyaan mission, including technologies developed so far, such as human-rated launch vehicles and system qualification. It pointed out that around 20 major tests, including three uncrewed missions of the Human Rated Launch Vehicle Mark-III, have been planned.