

India set to launch Mars mission in 2013

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An Indian Saddhu (holy person) watches the transit of Planet Venus across the sun with protective eyewear in Guwahati on June 6. India plans to launch a mission to Mars next year, putting an orbital probe around the red planet to study its climate and geology, top space department officials said on Thursday.

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The mission would mark another step in India's ambitious space programme, which envisages the Asian giant's first manned mission in 2016.

"We will embark on the Mars mission after the Department of Science gives the green signal and decides the schedule early next year," Deviprasad Karnik, director of the state-run [Indian Space Research Organisation \(ISRO\)](#) told AFP.

A 320-tonne Indian Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle rocket will be used to carry the orbiter spaceship, blasting off from the ISRO launch site at Sriharikota in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh.

Another senior official at ISRO, requesting anonymity, estimated the cost of the mission at 4.0-5.0 billion rupees (\$70-90 million dollars).

The central government earmarked 1.25 billion rupees for the project in the last federal budget.

India began its space programme in 1963 and has developed its own satellites and launch vehicles to cut dependence on overseas agencies.

In September, 2009, India's Chandrayaan-1 satellite discovered water on the moon, boosting the country's credibility among established space-faring nations.

But the space programme suffered a major setback in December 2010 when a satellite [launch vehicle](#) blew up and fell into the [Bay of Bengal](#) after veering from its intended flight path.

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