

India's mission to Mars crosses half-way mark

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Indian scientists and engineers of Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) monitor the Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) at the tracking centre in Bangalore on November 27, 2013

India's first mission to Mars successfully crossed the half-way mark on Wednesday, four months after leaving on an voyage to the Red Planet scheduled to take 11 months, the space agency said.

"The spacecraft crossed the half-way mark Wednesday at 9:50am on its

journey to Mars," the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said in a statement from the southern city of Bangalore.

"The spacecraft and its five [scientific instruments](#) are in good health."

The gold-coloured probe, the size of a small car, will aim to detect methane in the Martian atmosphere, which could provide evidence of some sort of life form on the fourth planet from the Sun.

The country has never before attempted inter-planetary travel, and more than half of all missions to Mars have ended in failure, including China's in 2011 and Japan's in 2003.

The low-cost Mars Orbiter Mission, known as "Mangalyaan" in India, was revealed in August 2012 by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, shortly after China's attempt flopped.

The timing and place of the announcement—in an Independence Day speech—led to speculation that India was seeking to make a point to its militarily and economically superior neighbour, despite denials from ISRO.

NASA has also launched a spacecraft to Mars, on a mission to study how the air on the planet has changed over time, and is also expected to reach its destination in September.

India's mission cost 4.5 billion rupees (\$75 million), a fraction of the cost of the US unmanned MAVEN spacecraft at \$671 million.

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