

US-India to collaborate on Mars exploration

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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (L) listens while US President Barack Obama makes a statement to the press after a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House September 30, 2014 in Washington, DC

The United States and India, fresh from sending their own respective spacecraft into Mars' orbit earlier this month, on Tuesday agreed to cooperate on future exploration of the Red Planet.

Two deals were signed during a meeting in Toronto, Canada, between NASA administrator Charles Bolden and Chairman K. Radhakrishnan of the Indian Space Research Organization.

One agreement would "establish a pathway for future joint missions to explore Mars," while the second allows for a collaboration on an Earth-observing satellite.

"The signing of these two documents reflects the strong commitment NASA and ISRO have to advancing science and improving life on Earth," Bolden said in a statement.

"This partnership will yield tangible benefits to both our countries and the world."

The partnership makes way for the creation of a "joint Mars Working Group (that) will seek to identify and implement scientific, programmatic and technological goals that NASA and ISRO have in common regarding Mars exploration," the US space agency said.

"The group will meet once a year to plan cooperative activities, including potential NASA-ISRO cooperation on future missions to Mars."

They also plan to "explore potential coordinated observations and science analysis between MAVEN and MOM," NASA said.

NASA's Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution (MAVEN) spacecraft arrived in orbit of the Red Planet on September 21, and is designed to study Mars' upper atmosphere.

ISRO's Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) is India's first spacecraft launched to Mars. It arrived September 23 on a mission to study the Martian surface and atmosphere.

Meanwhile, the Earth-observing satellite project, called the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission, is targeted to launch in 2020.

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