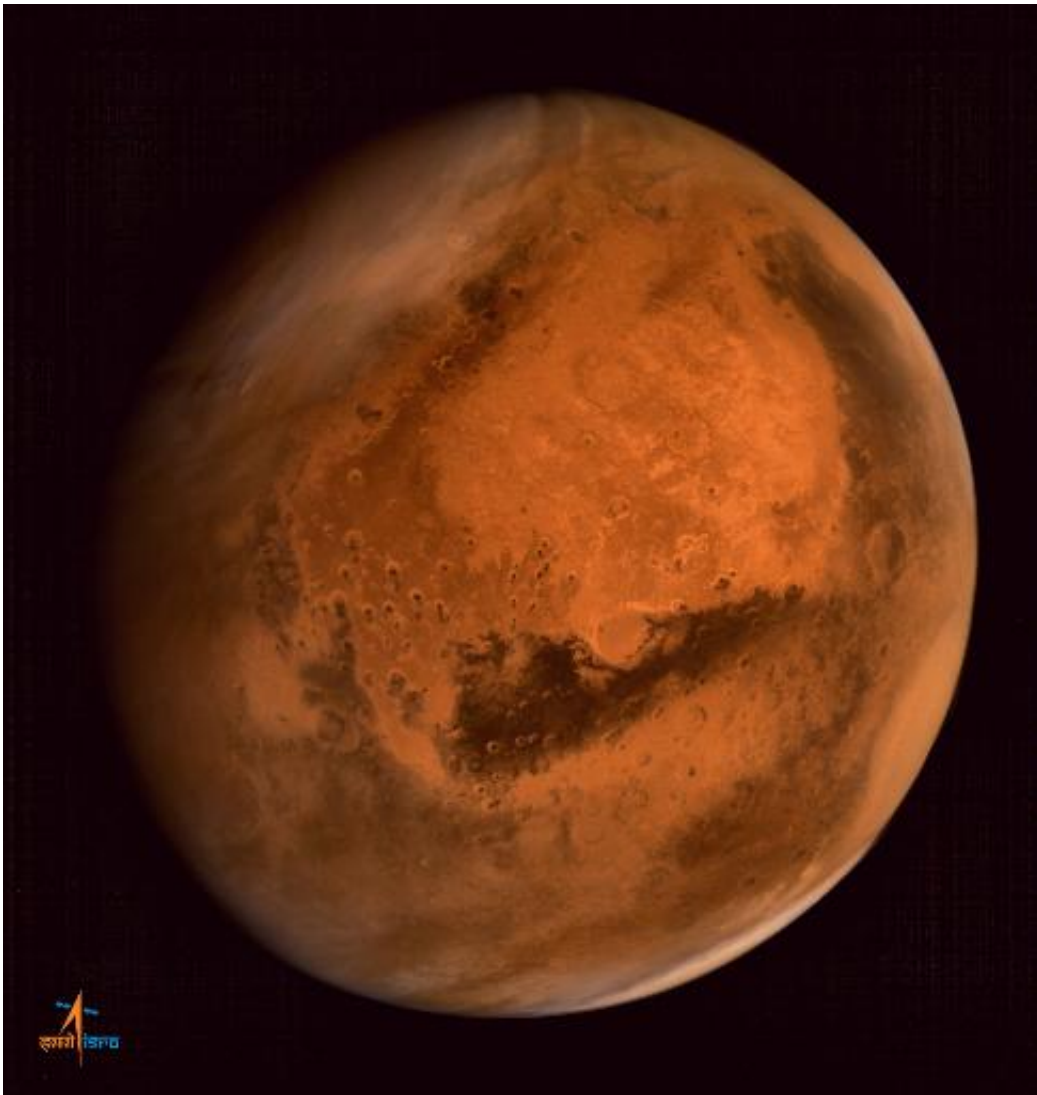


UAE launches project to send unmanned probe to Mars

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Mars is seen in an image taken by the ISRO Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) spacecraft

Oil-rich United Arab Emirates on Monday launched a project that aims to send the first Arab unmanned probe to Mars by 2021.

The Gulf state set up the UAE Space Agency to supervise and finance the "Emirates Institution for Advanced Science and Technology to execute and manage all stages of the Mars probe project," a statement said.

The two entities signed a seven-year partnership agreement Monday, setting the timing as well as legal and financial frameworks for the Mars project, said the statement.

The UAE government had revealed in July a plan to create a space agency to drive the project.

It said at the time that UAE investments in space technologies have already topped 20 billion dirhams (\$5.44 billion).

The UAE, a seven-emirate federation formed in 1971, will become the ninth country in the world with space programmes to explore the Red Planet, according to the statement.

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