

India's frugal Mars mission extended by six months

March 24 2015

India's famously frugal Mars mission has been extended by around six months thanks to a surplus of fuel on board the spacecraft, the country's space agency said Tuesday.

The Mars Orbiter Mission spacecraft had been scheduled to wrap up its mission this month after India in September became the first Asian nation to reach the Red Planet, all on a shoe-string budget.

But scientists said the [unmanned spacecraft](#) would remain in orbit to study the planet's atmosphere and its surface after burning less fuel than expected over the last six months.

"As the... Mars Orbiter has sufficient fuel to last longer than it was intended earlier, its mission has been extended for another six months," said Devi Prasad Karnik, director of the state-run Indian Space Research Organisation.

"The five scientific instruments on board the spacecraft will continue to collect data and relay them to our [deep space network](#) centre here for analysis," Karnik told AFP.

India's successful mission to Mars, all on its first attempt, is a huge source of national pride, while the government has heralded the project as an example of Indian-made capability.

The mission cost just \$74 million, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi

has quipped was less than the estimated \$100 million budget for the sci-fi Hollywood blockbuster "Gravity".

India has been trying to keep up with neighbouring giant China, which has poured billions of dollars into its own space programme.

Of the five instruments on board, the spacecraft's camera has been the most active, capturing images of the planet's surface, including valleys, mountains, craters, clouds and dust storms.

The other four have been conducting various experiments to study the Martian surface, including its mineral composition and to scan its atmosphere for methane gas, which comes mainly from living organisms.

Scientists at mission control in the southern city of Bangalore say the spacecraft and its instruments are functioning normally.

"The health and other parameters of the spacecraft are fine and all the essential functions continue to perform normal," Karnik said.

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Citation: India's frugal Mars mission extended by six months (2015, March 24) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-india-frugal-mars-mission-months.html>

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