
Editorial

Mars!

India's Mission Control center for the Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM) received confirmation that the spacecraft was in Mars orbit at 10:30 PM EDT Sept. 23, eliciting cheers from the scientists and engineers, and congratulations from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who witnessed the historic moment with them. This is the first time a fully successful mission to Mars has been carried out on a nation's first try. It is the first spacecraft launched from Asia that arrived safely at the Red Planet.

PM Modi described it as a "national pride event." Referencing the spacecraft's 650-million-kilometer trip to Mars, Modi said, "We have gone beyond the boundaries of human enterprise and imagination.... We have navigated our craft through a route known to very few.... The success of our space program is a shining symbol of what we are capable of as a nation.... Let us push our boundaries. And then push some more, push more.... Let today's success drive us with even greater vigor and conviction. Let's set ourselves even more challenging goals—this too must become a basis for challenging the next frontier."

Modi stated that the mission is "a leap into the dark. Humanity would not have progressed, if we had not taken such leaps into the unknown. And space is indeed the biggest unknown out there." Addressing the scientists directly, the Prime Minister said: "Every generation of your scientists has groomed the next homegrown lot. Through your achievements, you have honored our forefathers, and inspired our future generations! You truly deserve all the love and respect you get from a grateful nation."

Modi's remarks expressed the same optimism and focus on the future of all mankind, that he emphasized in his remarks at the July 14-16 BRICS

Summit in Brazil, where he said: "The uniqueness of BRICS as an international institution. For the first time, it brings together a group of nations on the parameter of 'future potential,' rather than existing prosperity or shared identities. The very idea of BRICS is thus forward-looking... Excellencies, we have an opportunity to define the future of, not just our countries, but the world at large.... I take this as a great responsibility."

NASA's Curiosity rover sent via Twitter: "Congratulations to @ISRO and India's first interplanetary mission upon achieving Mars orbit." MOM replied, "Howdy @MarsCuriosity. Keep in touch. I'll be around." China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying also extended congratulations: "This is the pride of India and the pride of Asia, and is a landmark progress in humankind's exploration of outer space so we congratulate India on that."

India's Mars Orbiter Mission has now met its primary mission objective, which is as a technology demonstrator, to successfully orbit Mars. It is also expected to collect scientific measurements during its orbital mission. NASA's MAVEN spacecraft arrived at Mars three days ago, and scientists from both projects have discussed sharing the data that each spacecraft will send back to Earth.

While Mars is not the ultimate objective, this achievement is a victory for both India and all mankind—and a marker of the kind of achievements all nations must collaborate on to ensure the future of the planet. Mars, as the Roman god of war, must be supplanted by Mars in the Solar System. In so doing, we will be redefining ourselves as citizens of the Solar System, committed to ending war, and inaugurating an era of peace with progress for all.