

ISRO eyes mission to Mars

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is open to launch a mission to Mars if the government gives a green signal, a top official of the space agency said here Wednesday.

'We can undertake a mission to Mars within five years of the government's approval. If the project is given the go-ahead now, we will be in a position to launch the mission to the red planet by 2012,' ISRO chairman G. Madhavan Nair told reporters.

Nair, however, hastened to add that the proposal for such a mission was under study by the space agency on the basis of a brief report prepared by the Indian scientific community.

'Our scientific community has come out with an outline of a mission to Mars. If the proposal is interesting, we will pursue it,' Nair said.

Nair's observation on ISRO's capability to reach Mars comes in the backdrop of China's decision to launch a joint mission to the planet with Russia in 2009.

The space agencies of the two countries have agreed to launch a Chinese-made satellite along with Phobos Explorer spacecraft of Russia in the next two years.

Referring to the domain expertise developed by ISRO in launch vehicles into outer space for undertaking missions such as Chandrayaan-1 next year, Nair said an India-made rocket like the GSLV (geo-synchronous launch vehicle) can carry over 500-kg payload and reach Mars without a hitch.

In the run-up to planetary explorations, ISRO will be undertaking an unmanned mission to moon (Chandrayaan-1) and a manned mission into space within eight years of government's clearance.

According to Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) council chairman and former ISRO chairman U.R. Rao, the rotation of Mars is similar to that of earth though the red planet has one-third density and one-tenth of its atmosphere.

'Since the daytime temperatures on Mars are about 20 degrees celsius and night temperatures are much lower, we should be able to build a spacecraft with similar atmosphere for colonising the red planet,' Rao said on the national science day recently.

A mission to Mars is projected to take up to six months one-way. As earth's natural satellite, moon can be used as a transit place for reaching Mars.

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