

# India plans first manned space flight in 2016

(AP) -- India's space agency is planning the nation's first manned space flight for 2016, if it gets government approval of the project budget, an official said Thursday.

The Indian Space Research Organization has sought 120 billion rupees (\$2.6 billion) to put two astronauts in space for a week, spokesman S. Satish told The Associated Press.

The government has already provided a pre-project fund of about four billion rupees (\$87 million) allowing the agency to do some initial research on the space flight, he said, adding that ISRO is "hopeful" of getting the entire project approved soon so it can start making full-scale preparations.

In October 2008, India launched Chandrayaan-1, its first satellite orbiting the moon, but had to abandon it nearly a year later after communication links snapped and scientists lost control of the satellite.

Chandrayaan-1 put India in an elite club of countries with moon missions. Similar satellites have been launched by the United States, Russia, the European Space Agency, Japan and China.

As India's economy has boomed in recent years, it has sought to convert its new found wealth - built on its high-tech sector - into political and military clout and stake a claim as a world leader.

India's neighbor and rival China has been forging ahead in space and in 2003 became the first Asian country to put its own astronauts into space. It followed that in 2008 with its first spacewalk.

India plans to follow the Chandrayaan, which means "moon craft" in Sanskrit, by landing a rover on the moon in 2011.

India began its space program in the 1960s and since 1975 has launched more than 50 remote sensing and communication satellites of its own and 22 for other nations, Satish said.

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