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France-India space cooperation CNES joins Indian Team Indus mission French technology to fly to the Moon in 2017

At the Toulouse Space Show, where India is guest of honour, CNES signed an agreement with Indian firm Axiom Research Labs to contribute to the Team Indus mission that is set to land a module and rover on the Moon in 2017. France will supply latest-generation CMOS micro-cameras developed in partnership with French firm 3DPlus.

Tuesday 28 June at the Toulouse Space Show, where India is guest of honour, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall and Rahul Narayan, Director of Axiom Research Labs, signed a letter of intent to fly leading-edge French technology on an Indian lunar rover for the first private mission to the Moon. CNES is thus teaming up with Axiom Research Labs to conduct a lunar landing in 2017 and CASPEX (Colour cmos cAMera for SPace EXploration) micro-cameras will equip sensors designed to aid the rover's progress by detecting ground obstacles in the path of its wheels.

This partnership plays into CNES's strategy of developing closer ties with the new generation of players from the NewSpace sphere, in which India is a prime mover. In so doing, CNES is demonstrating its ability to innovate and adapt. India's historic partnership with CNES dates back to 1964, when it signed its first space cooperation agreement with France.

The CASPEX micro-camera is built around complementary metal oxide semiconductor (CMOS) technology using integration methods patented by 3DPlus that reduce the size of an optical imaging instrument by a factor of ten. CASPEX is reprogrammable and radiation-tolerant, making it suited to a range of space missions. Produced by 3DPlus, a firm located in Buc, France, it will be making its first flight for this mission. Team Indus is led by Bangalore-based start-up Axiom Research Labs, the figurehead of the NewSpace movement in India. Team Indus is competing in the Google Lunar X Prize.

On the occasion of this signature, Jean-Yves Le Gall commented: "CNES must look for excellence where it is to be found, for today's space technology will drive tomorrow's technology revolutions and growth. In joining forces with Team Indus on this mission to land a rover on the Moon in 18 months' time, CNES is showing that innovation in France has a key role to play in NewSpace. These new players are doing things differently and working to short schedules by deploying innovative methods. The average age of our new partners is 30, so we will learn as much from them as they will from us."

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