



# Science REPORTER

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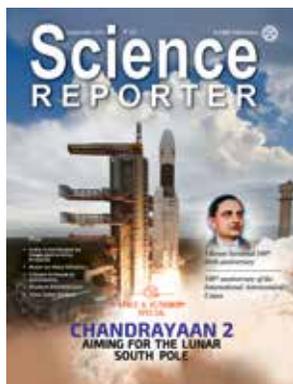
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## When Space Beckons

**FIFTY** years ago, in 1969, the first human landed on the Moon. 20 July 1969 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Apollo 11, the space mission that took the astronauts Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins to the Moon.

Human fascination for the Moon was satiated to some extent when Neil Armstrong became the first human to land on the lunar surface, followed by Buzz Aldrin. The first photographs of the Moon's surface and the astronauts walking on the Moon created an excitement worldwide never experienced before. For the first time, humans had set foot on solid ground in space.

The euphoria generated by the historic event pushed humans towards more such endeavours. Astronauts continued to be sent to space, some landed on the Moon, others spent time in space stations. It also fuelled further human desires to venture much beyond the Moon. And indeed, while spacecraft have since gone much farther deep into space, plans to send humans to Mars are also afoot.

The year 2019 is also being celebrated by the International Astronomical Union (IAU) as its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The International Astronomical Union (IAU) was founded in 1919 with the mission to promote and safeguard the science of astronomy in all its aspects, including research, communication, education and development through international cooperation.



The year 2019 also marks the 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Dr Vikram Sarabhai – the visionary who shaped India's space programme that is earning laurels for the country. A rare combination of scientist, innovator, industrialist and visionary Dr Sarabhai is popularly remembered as “the father of India's space programme”.

This issue of *Science Reporter*, therefore, is especially devoted to space and astronomy. Beginning with a special feature on Dr Vikram Sarabhai, the issue goes on to talk about women in astronomy, the quest to put the first humans on Martian soil possibly in the thirties, the increasing role of citizen science in astronomy, an account of India's participation in global mega science projects, role of planetariums in firing the imagination of the young, and a first person account of the recent Total Solar Eclipse in Chile.

The focus, of course, is India's most significant story – Chandrayaan-2, the country's most ambitious space project in recent times. Chandrayaan-2 was successfully launched on board India's most powerful launch vehicle GSLV MkIII on 22 July 2019 and is expected to land on the Moon on 7 September. This will be the first time in the world that a lander will land on the south pole of the Moon. There are possibilities of exciting findings. And the learning is expected to go a long way when India takes its next big leap – landing the first Indians on the Moon as part of the Gaganyaan mission, sometime in 2022.

Hasan Jawaid Khan

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