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Good luck, says Buzz, to India's lunar dream

Neil Armstrong's 'co-pilot' to the moon believes ISRO is 'doing just fine', says Mars should be the next stop

Reshma Patil
Mumbai, November 21

BUZZ ALDRIN wishes "the best of good fortune" for India's recently announced mission to land an Indian on the moon in 2020.

Aldrin, the second human — after Neil Armstrong in NASA's Apollo 11 mission — to set foot on the moon 37 years ago after a nervous lunar landing with 30 seconds' fuel to spare, is reluctant to believe that the risk of exploring space has reduced despite technological advances since that giant leap on July 20, 1969.

"We would all like to think that way but nothing is risk-free," said Aldrin in an exclusive interview to *Hindustan Times* from Singapore,

where he is a panelist for the *CNN Future Summit: World in Motion*.

"The moon is not a very pleasant place for life. It is quite harsh and extreme, not a handy dandy place to go to for a vacation," said Aldrin, who spent about 20 mostly sleepless hours on the lunar surface with a choice of beef stew or cream of chicken soup for dinner.

While Aldrin walked on the moon during the Cold War years of a competitive space race between the US and Russia, India's first unmanned lunar spacecraft Chandrayaan-1 will, by 2008, drop an impactor on the lunar surface as a trial for a future landing. Asked about the significance of continued voyages to the moon, Aldrin said: "Going to the moon is a dress re-

IF YOU ARE NOT WILLING TO COMMIT TO A GROWING PERMANENCE ON MARS, IS IT WORTH IT?

BUZZ ALDRIN



hearsal for what we might want to do for Mars much further away."

NASA is readying to send robotic probes to the moon by 2008 and camp astronauts for an extended expedition on the lunar surface by 2018 as a

test run for odysseys to Mars and deep space. For NASA, the return of man on the moon will be a precursor for a manned mission to Mars. Lately, the Indian Space Research Organisation has also revealed that Mars and Venus are on its long-term agenda.

"Space can be made available to more people than professionals," said Aldrin, who now heads Starcraft Enterprises to explore his ideas for space tourism and the potential of using resources like solar power and the ice and water at the moon's poles.

"I am not the one to advise India. They are doing fine," he said, but emphasised that going to Mars requires such enormous resources that it should not be spent on just one or two flights but in pursuit of

'permanent presence' on the Red Planet. "If you are not willing to commit nationally and internationally to a growing permanence on Mars, is it worth it?"

Aldrin pointed out that selection of a crew for moon missions should go beyond physical endurance or technical abilities to operate aircraft, and look for intelligence, judgement, decision-making abilities and tolerance for eccentricities of crew members.

Asked whether he dreams of a return flight to the moon, Aldrin, now in his 70s, said anybody would like the opportunity. But after a moment he added: "It was a pioneering, historical moment. Why would I want to do that again?"

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