

India joins advanced international astronomy project

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India has added another distinction to its credit in the field of astronomy with it becoming part of the prestigious (Thirty Metre Telescope) TMT project. Though India has been granted observer status initially it is entitled to become a full fledged partner in the long run.



An artist's impression of the TMT.

Three leading astronomical institutes namely the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, (IUCAA) Pune, the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) Bangalore and Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational-Sciences (ARIES), Nainital, have been instrumental in pushing the Indian initiative with respect to the project, which aims to unlock the secrets of the universe by studying various aspects of black holes, galaxies, stars and other celestial bodies.

The project, based at Mauna Kea, Hawaii has recently completed a \$77 million design development phase. The project is expected to advance to the onsite construction phase sometime in 2011.

The TMT project is being implemented under both private and public partnership and besides Indian observatories, the Chinese Academy of Sciences has also been accorded observer status since 2009.

An observer status provides scientists access to the telescope which will be operated by Caltech.

The current partners of the TMT include the California Institute of Technology, the University of California, and the Association of Canadian Universities for Research in Astronomy.

