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France-Japan space cooperation CNES and JAXA to explore Mars' moons together

Monday 10 April in Tokyo, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall and Naoki Okumura, President of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), signed an agreement to prepare the MMX (Martian Moons Exploration) mission that will depart in 2024.

Monday 10 April in Tokyo, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall and JAXA President Naoki Okumura signed an agreement in the presence of Jean-Pierre Bibring of the IAS space astrophysics institute and Saku Tsuneta of the Institute of Space and Astronautical Science (ISAS) covering the study phase of the MMX project (Martian Moons Exploration).

MMX is an ambitious project to return samples from Phobos, one of Mars' two moons with Deimos. The mission intends to probe the moons' origins and thus gain new insights into how our solar system formed and evolved. The agreement signed today covers phase A of the project, to which CNES will be contributing feasibility studies prior to a formal go-ahead decision, which Japan is expected to make by the end of this year for a mission launch in 2024.

This new joint endeavour stems from the renewal in 2015 of the framework cooperation agreement between CNES and JAXA, signed in the presence of the French and Japanese Prime Ministers. It ties in with the 2013-2018 roadmap set out in 2013 during President François Hollande's visit to Japan.

After the signature, Jean-Yves Le Gall commented: "I am delighted to have signed this new agreement with our Japanese partners. The MMX mission holds considerable science challenges and value for CNES and JAXA, and our partnership will be further strengthened by this mission to Mars, the new frontier of space exploration."

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