India achieves ‘historic’ space docking mission

AFP – India docked two satellites in space Thursday, a key milestone for the country’s dreams of a space station and manned Moon mission, the space agency said.
The satellites, weighing 220-kilogrammes (485 pounds) each, blasted off in December on a single rocket from India’s Sriharikota launch site. Later they separated.

On Thursday, the two satellites were manoeuvered back together in a “precision” process resulting in a “successful spacecraft capture”, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said, calling it a “historic moment”.

India became the fourth country to achieve the feat – dubbed as SpaDeX, or Space Docking Experiment – after Russia, the United States and China.

The aim of the mission is to “develop and demonstrate the technology needed for rendezvous, docking, and undocking of two small spacecraft”, ISRO said.

Two earlier docking attempts were postponed due to technical issues.

ISRO said the technology is “essential” for India’s Moon mission, and comes after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced plans last year to send a manned mission to the Moon by 2040.

The world’s most populous nation has flexed its spacefaring ambitions in the last decade with its space programme growing considerably, matching the achievements of established powers at a much cheaper price tag.

In August 2023, it became just the fourth nation to land an unmanned craft on the Moon.

AFP