

IUCAA to play key role in TMT project

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Pune: City-based Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) is among three institutes in the country to have been allowed 'observer' status on the governing board of the ambitious Thirty Metre Telescope (TMT) project.

TMT, which is expected to be the world's most advanced and capable astronomical observatory, will begin operations in 2018. The telescope would be able to observe planets that orbit stars other than the sun and enable astronomers to watch new planets and stars being formed. The construction of the telescope will take place later this year at Mauna Kea

in Hawaii.

The 'observer' status, which is a step towards India becoming a full partner in the project, will enable our astronomers to participate in the development and scientific use of the telescope. Indian scientists will get a share of the observational time proportional to the amount that the government contributes to the total project cost.

"The project will see IUCAA and the other institutes take part in developing the system, the software and also a data centre for the TMT," Ajit Kembhavi, director of IUCAA, told TOI on Tuesday.

The project report prepared by IUCAA, the Indian Institute of Astro-

physics (IIA), Bangalore, and the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), Nainital, was approved by the University of Hawaii board of Regents on Monday, leading to the grant of 'observer' status.

"The project is estimated at one billion dollars and India's contribution would be about 10 per cent of that, which will be funded by the government," Kembhavi said. "People all over the world will be involved in the project. Everyone involved will be working from their own countries initially and later team up." The telescope will have a 30-metre segmented mirror which will use diffraction of light and focus in a sharper way.