International Rover Challenge and Space Drone Challenge 2026 to Be Held at Manipal Institute of Technology, Manipal

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Manipal Institute of Technology (MIT), Manipal, will host the **International Rover Challenge (IRC) 2026** and the **International Space Drone Challenge (ISDC) 2026** from **January 28th to February 2nd, 2026**. Organised by the **Space Robotics Society**

(SPROS), the on-site finals will take place at the MIT campus, bringing together talented student teams in space robotics from across the globe. The MIT campus will be transformed into a simulated Martian environment through a specially designed Mars-analogue terrain called “**Sproscape**.” On this terrain, student-built rovers and aerial drones will carry out complex missions that closely resemble real-life space exploration tasks and astronaut-support operations on Mars.

MAHE Mars Rover strives to achieve excellence

Global Participation: After a rigorous multi-stage selection process, top-performing student teams from around the world have qualified for the on-site finals. International teams from **Poland and Germany (TU Berlin)** will compete alongside leading Indian institutions, including the **Indian Institute of Science (IISc), IITs, BITS, VIT, SRM, and MIT**. The event positions Manipal as a global hub for innovation and collaboration in space robotics.

Challenging Missions: IRC and ISDC are demanding engineering competitions that test students' ability to design, build, and operate advanced space robotics systems. The missions include:

- **Reconnaissance & Delivery Operation (R&DO):** Rovers navigate difficult terrain to locate targets and deliver payloads.
- **Astrobiology Expedition (ABEx):** Rovers collect soil samples and analyse them to detect possible biosignatures.
- **Instrument Deployment & Maintenance Operation (IDMO):** Rovers perform precision tasks on mock instrument panels, simulating servicing and maintenance work.
- **Autonomous Mission:** Rovers traverse unstructured terrain independently without human intervention.

Speaking on the occasion, **Dr (Cdr) Anil Rana, Director, MIT Manipal**, said, *"Hosting the International Rover Challenge and the International Space Drone Challenge reflects MIT's commitment to hands-on, future-focused engineering education. These competitions provide students with a unique opportunity*

to apply classroom learning to real-world space exploration challenges, while also developing teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving skills that are essential for careers in advanced technology sectors."

MIT Manipal's Leadership in Space Robotics: MIT Manipal, a constituent unit of the Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE), has a strong legacy in engineering education and innovation. Its student team, Mars Rover Manipal, has won the International Rover Challenge in 2024 and 2025, establishing itself as a leading force in space robotics. As the host team, they will defend their title on home ground against a strong international field.

Learning Beyond Competition: Beyond technical excellence, IRC and ISDC offer students valuable industry-relevant exposure. By closely simulating the expectations of the space and robotics industries, the competitions help bridge the gap between academic learning and practical application. Participants are evaluated not only on engineering performance but also on planning, project management, collaboration, and decision-making skills.

To learn more, please visit roverchallenge.org.

About Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE)

Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) is an Institution of Eminence Deemed-to-be University, offering over 400 specialisations across Health Sciences, Management, Law, Humanities & Social Sciences, and Technology & Science. MAHE operates through its constituent institutions across campuses in Manipal, Mangalore, Bengaluru, Jamshedpur, and Dubai.

Renowned for its academic excellence, world-class infrastructure, and impactful research contributions, MAHE has earned strong national and international recognition. In October 2020, the Ministry of Education, Government of India, conferred the prestigious Institution of Eminence status on MAHE. Currently ranked 3rd in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), MAHE continues to be a preferred destination for students seeking a transformative learning experience and vibrant campus life, as well as for national and multinational organisations in search of top talent.