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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

In the Running — Artemis II and the Future of Human Deep-Space Exploration

 THE HINDU

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"What does Artemis II signify for international space cooperation, and what lessons does it hold for India's Gaganyaan and Chandrayaan programmes?"

THE CORE ARGUMENT

NASA's **Artemis II** mission — the first crewed flight of the Space Launch System (SLS) and Orion spacecraft — lifted off in the early hours of April 2, 2026 (IST), sending four astronauts on a 10-day journey around the Moon without landing. The Hindu's editorial celebrates this as humanity's most significant step toward sustained deep-space presence since Apollo 17 (1972), while examining the systemic challenges NASA overcame — from hydrogen leaks during countdown tests to political pressure to cancel the programme amid budget constraints.

The mission matters beyond its immediate scientific value. Artemis II is a **proof-of-concept for the Artemis Architecture** — the multi-year plan to establish a permanent lunar Gateway space station, return humans to the Moon's surface (Artemis III), and eventually enable crewed Mars missions. Every component tested — SLS propulsion, Orion's life-support systems, deep-space communication links — reduces the risk for subsequent missions.

WHY INDIA MUST FOLLOW CLOSELY

India has a direct stake in how the Artemis programme evolves:

- **Artemis Accords:** India signed the Artemis Accords in June 2023 — a US-led framework governing norms of responsible behaviour in space exploration. This aligns India with the Artemis ecosystem while preserving independent space policy.
- **Gaganyaan:** India's own crewed spaceflight programme (first uncrewed test flights 2023–24; crewed mission planned for 2026) parallels the Artemis trajectory at a smaller scale.

- **Chandrayaan-3’s legacy:** India’s successful lunar south pole landing (August 2023) demonstrated the ability to operate in a domain now intensely contested between the US and China.
- **LUPEX:** India-Japan Lunar Polar Exploration mission, studying water ice at lunar poles — directly relevant to Artemis’s goal of sustainable lunar presence.

THE SPACE RACE RESHAPED

The 21st-century “space race” differs fundamentally from the Apollo era:

DIMENSION	APOLLO ERA (1960S)	ARTEMIS ERA (2020S)
Drivers	US-USSR Cold War rivalry	US-China strategic competition + commercial imperative
Actors	Two superpowers	Governments + private sector (SpaceX, Blue Origin, ISRO, etc.)
Goal	Flag planting, propaganda	Sustained presence, resource extraction, commercial services
International	Bilateral competition	Multilateral coalitions (Artemis Accords vs. China-Russia alliance)

China’s **Chang’e-6** (2024, first far-side sample return) and its planned crewed lunar mission (by 2030) add competitive urgency to Artemis’s timeline.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 — Science & Technology:

- Artemis Accords — India’s position; implications for space governance
- Space Launch System vs. Falcon Heavy — different philosophies of space transport
- Gaganyaan — objectives, technology demonstrators, international cooperation
- India’s space privatisation — IN-SPACe framework, Space Policy 2023

UPSC RELEVANCE

“Space exploration is no longer merely a scientific endeavour — it is a strategic arena where technological capability, diplomatic alignment, and national ambition intersect.”

FACTS CORNER

- **Artemis II crew:** Reid Wiseman (commander), Victor Glover, Christina Koch, Jeremy Hansen (Canada)
- **SLS (Space Launch System):** NASA's most powerful rocket; 322 feet tall; 8.8 million lbs thrust — more than Saturn V
- **Orion:** Crew capsule; heat shield tested to 5,000°F during reentry; 4-astronaut capacity
- **Lunar Gateway:** Planned mini space station in lunar orbit; Canada, Japan, ESA are partners
- **Artemis Accords:** As of 2026, 40+ nations signed; India signed June 2023; China and Russia have not signed
- **Gaganyaan:** India's crewed spaceflight programme; target: 3 Indian astronauts (Vyomanauts) in Low Earth Orbit
- **LUPEX:** Lunar Polar Exploration mission; ISRO-JAXA joint project; will study water ice deposits at lunar south pole
- **Apollo 17:** Last crewed Moon landing; December 1972; Gene Cernan was the last human to walk on the Moon

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