A Moon Trip that Failed to Take-off

What is the issue?

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- An agreement was made between Antrix Corporation (commercial arm of ISRO) and a start-up TeamIndus on a mission to moon.
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- Recently that project was called off due to some practical difficulties.
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What was agreed mission was about?

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- Google Lunar XPrize was contest which was to soft-land a spacecraft on the moon, and move a robotic rover for 500 metres on the lunar terrain.
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- It was also demanded that the robot must send videos and pictures from there all this before March 31, 2018.
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- It was mandated that each team must be at least 90% private-funded.
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- In 2007 a Bengaluru based start-up TeamIndus conceived the moon-landing contest, this made corporate icons and about 70-odd individuals to bless TeamIndus and put their money in it.
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- Some of ISRO’s retired brains, who had led its 2008 Chandrayaan-1 and Mars orbiter missions, were roped in to achieve the mission
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- TeamIndus also won an encouraging milestone prize of $1 million from google.
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- In December 2016, it also found timely space transport through ISRO’s PSLV rocket.
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What is the reason for the failure of the project?

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- About 100-plus young engineers for over seven years were working for this project but the project was failed.
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- It noted that the teams could not raise the funds they needed, they also ran into technical and regulatory difficulties.
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- It needed another six months to raise the money for hardware imports for the spacecraft and the rover.
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- The landing spacecraft and the rover should have been sent to the ISRO for flight qualification clearance about six months before the launch date. TeamIndus was nowhere near it.
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- Antrix and TeamIndus, which are contract-bound not to disclose details of the deal, have not clarified the whispers around the cancelled launch.
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What are constrains in funding a space project?

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- Pioneering state-funded lunar landing missions of the U.S. and the former Soviet Union did not succeed at first shot, the Google Lunar XPrize itself conceded a private-funded “moonshot” is not easy.
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- TeamIndus raised about half of the $60-65 million (around Rs.400 crore) it needed to complete the mission, new investors did not appear enthused.
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- Space travel costs are high even it is a ride on an internationally economical PSLV.
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- It may have cost TeamIndus Rs.150-200 crore plus insurance to launch its 600 kg spacecraft.
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- TeamIndus was to pay Antrix in instalments and clear the entire sum before the launch but the company was only able to pay its 1st instalment.
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Source: the Hindu

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