

LIGO Detects Gravitational Waves for the Third Time

Firmly transiting into the era of Gravitational Wave Astronomy

Strictly embargoed till 8:30 PM IST on 1 June 2017

The Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory (LIGO) has made another successful detection of gravitational waves, ripples in space and time, from the merger of two massive black holes that happened three billion light years away. This firmly reiterates the remarkable launch, announced last year, of a new window of astronomy.

The new detection occurred during the ongoing second observing run of the Advanced LIGO detectors in the USA, which began on November 30, 2016. The first direct observation of gravitational waves was made in September 2015 during the first observing run. A second detection was made in December 2015. The third detection, made on January 4, 2017, is described in a new paper accepted for publication in the journal *Physical Review Letters*. These detections were made possible by contributions from more than thousand researchers from many different countries, setting a great example in collaborative science. Indian scientists have done foundational work over the last three decades in modelling the signal waveforms and developing mathematical techniques to search for gravitational wave signals in noisy data. A new generation of Indian scientists are expanding these contributions on several other frontiers. The publication has 40 authors from 11 Indian institutions.

The third event was produced by the merger of two black holes, 31 and 19 times as massive as the Sun, forming a larger black hole of about 49 solar masses. Also, the data suggests that at least one of the black holes in this binary system might have been spinning in a direction that is not completely aligned with the orbital rotation of the binary, providing potential clues on how these binaries might have formed. The new event also provides new opportunities to test Einstein's theory of general relativity. For example, this allowed us to confirm Einstein's prediction that gravitational waves should not undergo 'dispersion' -- the phenomena of waves traveling at different speeds depending on their wavelength. Indian scientists played a leading role in deriving this result.

Indian scientists contributed to developing and carrying out tests of Einstein's theory using this event, to the estimation of the properties of the remnant black hole, and to the search for possible electromagnetic flashes associated with this event. The Cadmium Zinc Telluride Imager (CZTI) on the Indian space observatory *AstroSat* conducted the most sensitive search for short duration X-ray flashes associated with this event, but did not find anything. When an optical source potentially related to the LIGO event was discovered, the CZTI team joined hands with the international GROWTH collaboration to study it. This India-led study proved that the optical source was not related to this event.

IUCAA, an autonomous Centre of the UGC, has been making crucial contribution to this grand observational effort for nearly three decades. Several of its members took part in the estimation of black hole parameters, testing of general theory of relativity, following up the event with other telescopes, characterisation of the detectors and improving their sensitivity, which in turn helped in extending the observable range, making it possible to detect a source three billion light years away. Some of the IUCAA members are playing major part in taking a big leap in Gravitational Wave Astronomy by building a detector in India. Describing the achievements to be really satisfying the Director of IUCAA Professor Somak Raychaudhury said "The continuing discoveries of GW events as expected shows how this subject is rapidly evolving into a distinct field of Science. I am proud that scientists in India, in particular at IUCAA, continue to play leading roles." We hope that success will continue in the coming years. The following members from IUCAA are coauthors of the paper announcing the new discovery: Anirban Ain, Sukanta Bose, Sanjeev Dhurandhar, Bhooshan U. Gadre, Sharad G. Gaonkar, Sanjit Mitra, Nikhil Mukund, Jayanti Prasad and Tarun Souradeep.

Meanwhile, the planned LIGO-India observatory, that received in-principle approval from the Union cabinet in February 2016, and will be funded by the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the Department of Science & Technology (DST), has made rapid progress towards the plan to join these exciting scientific observations in 2024. LIGO-India will greatly enhance the scientific capabilities of the international network of observatories for astronomy, primarily by enabling precise pointing to the location of the gravitational wave events in the sky.

Scientific and engineering teams at IPR Gandhinagar, IUCAA Pune and RRCAT Indore are actively engaged in the pre-construction activities of LIGO-India.

67 scientists from 13 Indian institutions are part of the LIGO Scientific Collaboration, under the umbrella of the Indian Initiative in Gravitational-Wave Observations (IndIGO). The Indian team in LIGO includes scientists from CMI Chennai, ICTS-TIFR Bengaluru, IISER-Kolkata, IISER-Trivandrum, IIT Bombay, IIT Madras, IIT Gandhinagar, IIT Hyderabad IPR Gandhinagar, IUCAA Pune, RRCAT Indore, TIFR Mumbai and UAIR Gandhinagar. Some of the data analysis work were carried out using the high-performance computing facilities at IUCAA Pune and ICTS-TIFR Bengaluru.

LIGO is an international collaboration with members around the globe. Its observations are carried out by twin detectors in the USA — one in Hanford, Washington, and the other in Livingston, Louisiana. LIGO is funded by the [National Science Foundation](#) (NSF), and operated by [MIT](#) and [Caltech](#), which conceived and built the project. Financial support for the Advanced LIGO project was led by NSF with Germany ([Max Planck Society](#)), the U.K. ([Science and Technology Facilities Council](#)) and Australia ([Australian Research Council](#)) making significant commitments and contributions to the project. More than 1,000 scientists from around the world participate in the effort through the LIGO Scientific Collaboration, which includes the GEO Collaboration. LIGO partners with the [Virgo Collaboration](#), a consortium including 280 additional scientists throughout Europe supported by the [Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique](#) (CNRS), the [Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare](#) (INFN), and [Nikhef](#), as well as Virgo's host institution, the European Gravitational Observatory. Additional partners are listed at: <http://ligo.org/partners.php>.

The CZT–Imager instrument onboard the AstroSat satellite is built by a consortium of Institutes across India, including TIFR Mumbai, VSSC Thiruvananthapuram, ISAC Bengaluru, IUCAA Pune, SAC Ahmedabad and PRL Ahmedabad. The Indian Space Research Organisation funded, managed and facilitated the project. GROWTH was project funded by the National Science Foundation under Grant No 1545949, and by the corresponding grant from the Science and Engineering Research Board, Department of Science and Technology, India.

Contact: Sanjit Mitra, Mobile: +918275067686

For more information and multimedia please visit:

<http://www.gw.iucaa.in/news/gw170104/>

<http://www.ligo.org/multimedia.php>