

India launches first commercial rocket

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India's first commercial rocket was fired into space Monday, carrying a 776-pound Italian satellite that will collect data on the origins of the universe.

The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle rocket took off from the Sriharikota launch pad in India's southern state of Andhra Pradesh, the Press Trust of India reported.

Separately, the BBC reported scientists at the Indian Space Research Organization broke out into spontaneous applause when the rocket lifted off into a clear blue sky.

In his message to ISRO chairman Gopalan Madhavan Nair, state Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy said, "The space scientists made India proud with their excellent performance in the first ever launch of (the satellite) atop India's workhorse rocket," the PTI report said.

The satellite AGILE was launched 23 minutes after the rocket's takeoff. The BBC said India reportedly is being paid \$11 million to launch the Italian satellite.

Other media reports said with the latest launch, India has joined the United States, Russia, France, China and Japan with similar achievements.

ISRO's future plans include sending an unmanned mission to the Moon next year.

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