India launches three satellites on single rocket

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The main satellite in the launch from the Sriharikota space centre in Andhra Pradesh was the remote-sensing Resourcesat-2, which will study the effect of human life on the Earth's natural resources.

The rocket also carried an Indo-Russian satellite for stellar and atmospheric studies and an imaging orbiter built by the Singapore-based Nanyang Technological University.

"The Resourcesat-2 mission is successful," Indian Space Research

Organisation (ISRO) chairman K. Radhakrishnan announced after all three satellites were released by the rocket 822 kilometres (510 miles) above Earth.

The successful mission was a relief for India's space project, which suffered a major setback in December when a satellite launch vehicle blew up and fell into the Bay of Bengal live on television after it veered from its intended flight path.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that Wednesday's launch, which was greeted with cheers from scientists, "demonstrated yet again the advanced capabilities" of the nation's space programme.

India, which aims to send its first manned flight into space in 2016, first staked a claim for a share of the lucrative commercial satellite-launch market by sending up an Italian orbiter in 2007.

The country sees its space exploration programme as an achievement that underlines its emergence as a major world economy, and many Indians take patriotic pride in its development.