

SpaceX launches Taiwan's first home-built satellite

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Space X's Falcon 9 rocket prepared for a launch to the International Space Station in February 2017 at the Kennedy Space Center, Florida

SpaceX on Thursday launched the first satellite designed and built entirely in Taiwan, a spacecraft that aims to boost disaster forecasts and mapping, environmental observation and space research.

The satellite, called FORMOSAT-5, weighs nearly 1,000 pounds (450

kilograms) and blasted off atop a Falcon 9 rocket at 11:51 am (1851 GMT).

"Falcon 9 has lifted off," SpaceX engineer Lauren Lyons said as the rocket soared into the sky over the launch pad at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, leaving billowing clouds of smoke in its wake.

About 10 minutes after launch, SpaceX confirmed that FORMOSAT-5 had been successfully deployed into orbit.

The satellite is designed to operate for five years, and will orbit the Earth once every 100 minutes.

Its predecessor, FORMOSAT-2, was decommissioned last year after 12 years, a lifespan in which it mapped a series of major disasters in parts of Asia and Africa.

It, too, had been designed to operate for just five years.

Rocket sticks landing

Continuing its effort to re-use expensive rocket components instead of jettisoning them into the ocean after each launch, SpaceX managed to land the first stage of the Falcon 9 on a platform floating in the Pacific Ocean.

"This is the 15th successful landing of a Falcon 9," Lyons said on the live webcast, as cheers erupted at SpaceX mission control in Hawthorne, California.

After separating from the second stage of the rocket, the taller, first stage portion powered its engines and made a controlled return to Earth.

Cameras mounted on the rocket showed it touch down, upright, on a drone ship named "Just Read the Instructions."

SpaceX plans to haul the rocket back to land and refurbish it so it can be used in a future launch.

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