

Japan sends cargo to space station

21 July 2012

A Japanese H-IIB rocket blasted off Saturday to deliver an unmanned supplies vessel to the International Space Station.

The rocket lifted off into an overcast sky from the southern island of Tanegashima on schedule at 11:06 am (0206 GMT), according to live images relayed by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).

About 15 minutes later, the rocket successfully released a cargo vessel called "konotori" (stork in Japanese), containing supplies such as food, clothing and tools necessary for experiments to be done in space.

The cargo should reach the International Space Station, where Japanese astronaut Akihiko Hoshide is staying, on July 27.

Japan's leading aerospace firm Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, which helped develop the rocket, is expected to take over future operations of the H-IIB and send four more cargo vehicles to the International Space Station by 2016.

After the launch, JAXA president Keiji Tachikawa said the rocket should also be used to explore the potentially lucrative satellite launch market.

"By expanding the scope of its use, (the H-IIB) I hope, will be used to respond to various demands of clients," he told reporters.

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