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Brazil Revives Space Program with New Rocket Launch

After a terrible accident in 2003, that set it back compared to major competitors

A new rocket was launched this week from the Alcantara launch site near the northeastern city of Sao Luis, in an effort to revive Brazil's space program, halted after a terrible accident that claimed the lives of 21 people, in 2003, including several scientists, when a satellite-launching rocket exploded at the same launch site. But that is now a thing belonging to the past, which the Brazilian Space Agency wants to put behind, with the launch of the VSB-30 sounding rocket, that carried scientific experiments in an effort to prove that the country will catch up with the more advanced countries, like the US, Japan, China or India, that are several decades ahead in research and available technology. Like those countries, Brazil hopes it will soon be able to sell carrier rockets, which will lift satellites into orbit, for various countries which possess only the satellites and not the launch capabilities. This is a very lucrative business, that relaunched the Russian space program - by carrying cargo for NASA and the ESA - and gave rise to a strong Chinese one - China recently launched a Nigerian telecom satellite into orbit - countries Brazil hopes to join as soon as possible. "We know how to make satellites but not the rockets to transport them. We would have made more progress if the rocket technology and construction had been in civilian hands," said Jose Leonardo Ferreira, professor of space sciences at the University of Brasilia. For now, the rocket flew only 20 km into the air and the equipment onboard was recovered from the Atlantic Ocean, but the space agency has high hopes that will materialize around the year 2010.