

Europe launches billion-dollar Gaia telescope

PARIS, FRANCE: The European Space Agency (ESA) launched an advanced telescope design to detect a billion stars and provide the most detailed map yet of the Milky Way.



The European Space Agency has successfully put its telescope Gaia into orbit where it will map part of the Milky Way. Image: [ESA](#)

The Gaia telescope was successfully hoisted into orbit by a Soyuz-STB-Fregat rocket from ESA's space base in Kourou, French Guiana, the agency reported in a webcast.

"All is functioning normally," an ESA commentator said.

The satellite was deployed 42 minutes after launch.

The €740m device, the most sophisticated space telescope ever built by Europe, aims at creating an "astronomical census" of a billion stars, or around one percent of all the stars in the Milky Way.

By repeating the observations as many as 70 times throughout its mission, Gaia can help astronomers calculate the distance, speed, direction and motion of these stars and build a 3-D map of our section of the galaxy.

It will also help in the search for planets beyond our Solar System - as many as many as 50,000 so-called extrasolar planets could be spotted during the satellite's five-year life, astronomers hope.

Gaia will observe the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter to help the search for any asteroids that may one day threaten Earth. It will also keep a watch for exploding stars, called supernovae, which are rarely observed in real time.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge