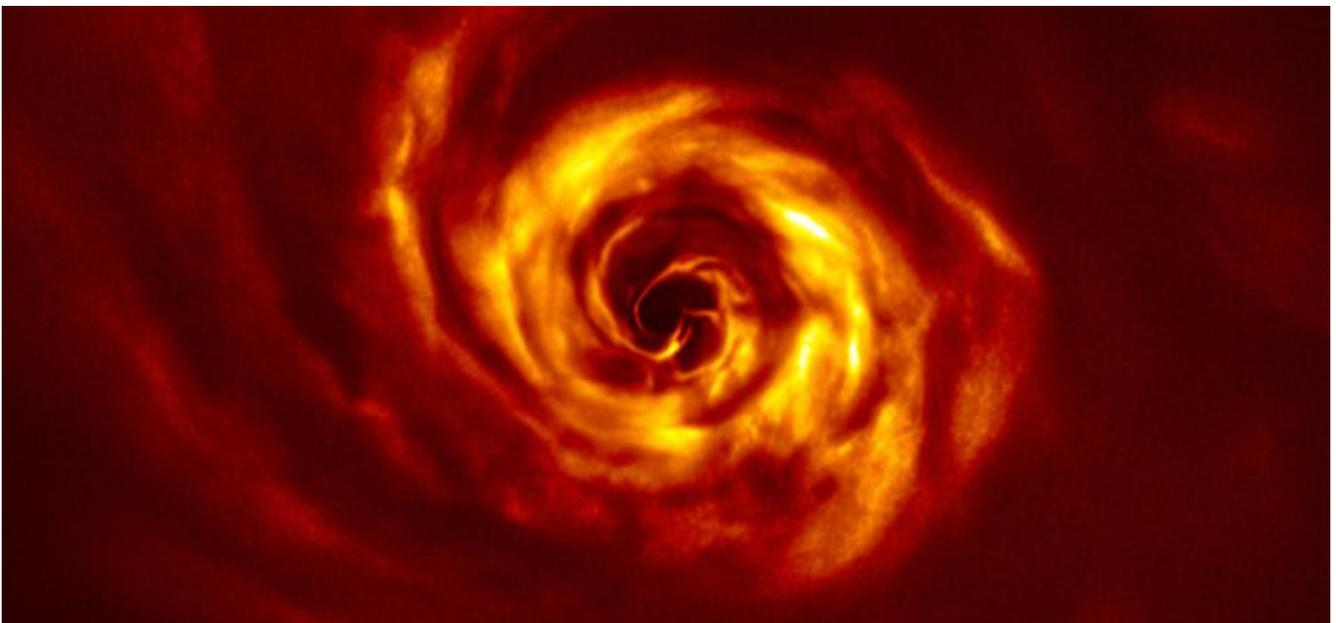


For the first time astronomers watch a baby exoplanet being formed



This image shows the disc around the young AB Aurigae star, where ESO's Very Large Telescope (VLT) has spotted signs of planet birth. Close to the centre of the image, in the inner region of the disc, we see the 'twist' (in very bright yellow) that scientists believe marks the spot where a planet is forming. . ESO/BOCCALETTI ET AL.

News: For the first time ever astronomers believe they have watched a baby exoplanet being born using one of our planet's biggest telescopes.

Planets that orbit around other stars are called *exoplanets*. This baby exoplanet was found around a young star called AB Aurigae, 520 light years away from Earth. A light-year is the distance light travels in a year i.e. 9.5 trillion km.



The four Unit telescopes of the VLT are illuminated by the bright glow of the Milky Way above them.

Astronomers at the European Southern Observatory in Chile were using a powerful telescope, ironically called the Very Large Telescope (VLT) to study this young star.

They spotted a swirling dense disc of dust and gas around the young star. Inside this disc they spotted a very subtle twist in the gas. This “twist” pattern of gas and dust is where they believe a new world is forming.

The VLT in Chile has taken some clear images of this young disc which have’t been possible before.

Why is this find significant?

Astronomers have long known that planets are born in dusty discs surrounding young stars but the process has never been seen before.

Dr Anthony Boccaletti, the lead astronomer on the study explains that astronomers have been able to discover thousands of exoplanets but haven’t understood how they form. He believes it is very important to study young exoplanet systems so we can learn more about how they are formed.