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China heads launch list of space rockets

Long March carrier liftoff on Thursday completes successful annual program

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China launched a Long March 3B carrier rocket at Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province early on Thursday, marking the completion of the country's annual launch schedule.

The rocket blasted off at 0:43 am and transported the Communication Technology Demonstrator 9 experimental satellite into a geosynchronous orbit, China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, the nation's leading space contractor, said in a statement.

Developed by the company's China Academy of Space Technology, the satellite is tasked with verifying multiband, high-speed satellite communication technologies, the statement said.

The mission was the 48th flight of the Long March rocket family this year.

Five-and-a-half hours earlier, a Long March 2D rocket lifted off

from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Northwest China's Gobi Desert and put the Tianhui 4 satellite into orbit. The satellite will be used to conduct scientific experiments and land surveys and collect geological information. Tianhui means "sky mapping."

Long March rockets have carried out more orbital launches this year than any other rocket family in the world, and all were successful.

Earlier this month, the Long March family reached its 400th flight mission with a Long March 4B rocket lifting off from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center. China launched its first carrier rocket — a Long March 1 that was based on a ballistic missile — in April 1970, to send its first satellite, Dongfanghong 1, or East Red 1, into space. The mission made China the fifth country capable of building and launching its own carrier rocket capable of reaching Earth's orbit.



A Chinese Long March 3B carrier rocket blasts off at 0:43 am on Thursday from Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province, marking the 48th flight of the Long March rocket family this year. LIU GUOXING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Since then, the country has developed and launched more than 20 types of Long March-series rockets, and 15 of them are in active service.

Due to the Long March family's frequent flights, China is expected to fulfill more space missions this year than any other nation, with 55 orbital launches.

In addition to the Long March rockets, China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp conducted four

launches of its Kuaizhou 1A rocket, while two Beijing-based private rocket companies carried out three launches.

The United States has launched 45 rockets this year, ranking second in rocket liftoffs.

This year, China will become the leading annual launcher of carrier rockets for the third time, after topping the list in 2018 and 2019. It launched 39 rockets in 2018 and 34 in 2019. Last year, China

launched 39 rockets, compared with the US' 44.

Wang Ya'an, editor-in-chief of Aerospace Knowledge, said China is already an influential power in terms of space capabilities and Chinese engineers are striving to make more advances.

"They are designing the Long March 9 super-heavy rocket that will be powerful enough to transport astronauts to the moon and larger probes into deep space," he said.