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Long March family notches 400th launch

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China lifted a Long March 4B carrier rocket on Friday morning to place several technology demonstration satellites into space, marking the 400th launch of the Long March family.

The 16-story rocket blasted off at 8:11 am from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China's Gobi Desert, ripping apart the dawn sky with its orange-red flame and echoing thunder, which was caught on video published by the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, maker of the Long March 4B series.

The payloads in the mission — Shijian 6-06 satellites — were also manufactured by the Shanghai academy, and are tasked with spatial environmental surveying and new technology demonstration, the academy said in a statement, noting the 400th launch marked a new milestone of the Long March fleet.

Of the 400 liftoffs, 252 were carried out by models developed by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology in Beijing and 148 by Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology. Both the two academies are subsidiaries of the State-owned space conglomerate China Aero-



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Wang Yanan, editor-in-chief of Aerospace Knowledge magazine

space Science and Technology Corp, the country's major space contractor.

China launched its first carrier rocket — a Long March 1 — 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 to reach Earth's orbit.

Since then, the country has developed and launched nearly 20 types of Long March-series rockets, and 11 of them are in active service.

So far, the Long March family has conducted over 92 percent of the

nation's launch missions, deploying more than 700 spacecraft in orbit. The overall success rate of the Long March fleet is 96.25 percent, according to China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

Wang Yanan, editor-in-chief of Aerospace Knowledge magazine, said the growth of the Long March series represents China's rising space capability.

"It took 37 years for the Long March family to perform its first 100 launches. The next 100 launches used seven and a half years. By comparison, the third 100 launches were made in over four years while the most recent 100 launches took only two years and nine months," he said. "The Long March rockets have placed our probes on the moon and a Chinese rover on the Martian soil. They have helped China become an influential power in the global space arena."

Designers at the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology are designing two models of super-heavy rockets that will be several times bigger and mightier than the Long March 5, now the biggest and strongest in the Long March family, and they will be used to send Chinese astronauts to the moon and large probes to deep space, according to the academy.