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香港版
HONG KONG

CHINA DAILY

中國日報

www.chinadailyhk.com HK \$10

FRIDAY, December 30, 2022

Latest launch marks 64th mission of 2022

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China launched a Long March 3B carrier rocket on Thursday afternoon to transport an experimental satellite into space, completing the busiest year in terms of launch numbers for the country's space industry.

The rocket blasted off at 12:43 pm at the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Southwest China's Sichuan province and then deployed the Shiyao 10-02 experimental satellite into a preset orbit, China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, the nation's leading space contractor, said in a news release.

The satellite will have the task of demonstrating new technologies for space environmental monitoring and other purposes.

The launch marked the 53rd flight of the Long March rocket family this year and the 468th since the large fleet's debut flight in 1970. It also is the 64th space mission by China this year.

The company said the flight is the last task for the Long March rocket fleet this year.

Among the Long March flights in 2022, the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology carried out 30, while 23 were made by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology. Both are subsidiaries of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

Multiple sources inside China's space industry confirmed on Thursday that there will be no other launches in the country this year.

This was the first time that China conducted more than 60 rocket liftoffs in a year.

Long Lehao, a top rocket scientist at the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, said on Thursday that about 27 percent of all Long March flights this year were undertaken by new types of rockets developed in recent years.

"The fact that new-generation rockets have been widely used represents a big leap in our research, development and production capabilities in the carrier rocket field," he said.

Zhu Liangcong, a chief structural designer of rockets at the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, said that rocket models made at the academy are mainly used to deploy satellites to low orbits.

"The rapidly expanding business of low-orbit satellite networks in China has led to a rising demand for rockets to send satellites, thus giving us more orders," he said.

The Long March 2D model, a product of the Shanghai academy, made 15 liftoffs this year, becoming the busiest of all Chinese rockets by the number of annual flights, according to Zhu.

In 2021, China conducted 55 space launches, with the Long March series carrying out 48 of them. The final launch last year was also made by the Long March 3B model.

China launched more carrier rockets than any other country in 2018, 2019 and 2021. The United States, which was the second-largest user of rockets those years, has conducted 86 launches so far this year.

China launched its first carrier rocket — a Long March 1 that was a modified ballistic missile — in April 1970 to send its first satellite, Dongfanghong 1, into space. The mission made China the fifth country capable of building and launching its own carrier rocket to reach Earth orbit.

Since then, the country has developed and launched nearly 30 types of carrier rockets, most of them part of the Long March series.

Currently, there are 22 models of carrier rockets in service in China, 16 of which are in the Long March family.



A Long March 3B carrier rocket lifts off on Thursday afternoon at the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province to transport an experimental satellite into space. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY