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Radar satellite successfully launched

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China launched the Gaofen 3C radar satellite on Thursday morning, according to the China National Space Administration.

The satellite was lifted into orbit on a Long March 4C rocket that blasted off at 7:47 am from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China. It contains a C-band synthetic-aperture radar with a ground image resolution of 1 meter, the administration said in a release.

The launch marked the 414th

flight of the Long March rocket family and the ninth space mission by China this year.

The satellite will join its predecessors — Gaofen 3A and 3B — to create a radar satellite network for observing specific land and sea areas, the administration said.

Gaofen 3A was launched in August 2016 and Gaofen 3B was deployed in November 2021.

They are in a sun-synchronous orbit at an altitude of 755 kilometers. Each circles the Earth 14.5 times a day, according to Zhang Qingjun, project manager and chief designer of the satellites at the Chi-

na Academy of Space Technology.

The three-satellite network will protect China's maritime interests, prevent and mitigate maritime disasters and enable researchers to better study the marine environment. It will also be used in environmental protection, water conservancy, agriculture and meteorology, Zhang said.

"A joint imaging operation by the network will cover nearly one-fifth of all oceans and seas in the world," he noted.

Its main user will be the National Satellite Ocean Application Service of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

China has 32,000 km of coastlines, 380,000 square kilometers of territorial seas and more than 6,500 islands of at least 500 square meters each. Therefore, satellites like the Gaofen 3 series are very useful in safeguarding the country's maritime rights and interests, experts said.

China launched the Gaofen program in May 2010 and listed it as one of the 16 national important projects in science and technology. The program has established a space-based, high-resolution Earth observation network with dozens of Gaofen satellites in operation.

Images and data from Gaofen satellites have been widely used in more than 20 industries across China and have helped reduce the

country's dependence on foreign remote-sensing products. More than 80 percent of satellite images that China needed to buy from foreign countries previously have been replaced by Gaofen products, according to Tong Xudong, chief designer of the Gaofen program at the space administration.

The Long March 4C rocket model is built by the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, a CASC subsidiary.

With a liftoff weight of 250 metric tons, a Long March 4C is mainly used to send satellites into sun-synchronous orbit. It is capable of transporting satellites with a combined weight of 3 tons to a typical sun-synchronous orbit 700 km above the earth.