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Satellites launched to bolster internet

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China launched a group of internet satellites into orbit on Sunday evening, marking the fifth in-orbit deployment of such spacecraft in a month.

The satellites are the ninth group of low-orbit hardware in China's State-owned internet network. They were lifted by a Long March 6A carrier rocket at 10:15 pm from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center in Shanxi province and soon arrived in their orbital positions, according to China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, which conducted the launch.

Over the past month, five batches of satellites have been sent into orbit for the in-orbit networking of the country's massive space-based internet system, which is often likened to a Chinese version of SpaceX's Starlink.

The fifth group in the network was launched on July 27, the sixth on July 30, the seventh on Aug 4, and the eighth on Aug 13.

Upon its completion, the Chinese mega-constellation will consist of about 13,000 satellites operating in low-Earth orbit to create an internet system with worldwide coverage.

The latest batch was designed and built by the Shanghai-based Innovation Academy for Microsatellites of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. It is tasked with using its Ka-band transmitters to provide communications and internet service to users.

The Long March 6A rocket model was developed by the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, a CASC subsidiary, as a medium-lift launch vehicle.

The rocket has a liftoff weight of 530 metric tons and is mainly used to transport satellites to multiple types of orbit, including sun-synchronous, low-Earth and intermediate circular orbit. It consists of a 50-meter, liquid-propelled core booster and four solid-fuel side boosters.

When used to reach the typical sun-synchronous orbit 700 kilometers above Earth, the model can carry satellites with a combined weight of more than 4.5 tons.

Sunday's launch was the third time the Long March 6A type was used to carry satellites involved in the internet network. It also marked China's 48th rocket launch this year, and the 590th flight of the Long March rocket family.

Earlier on Sunday, a Long March 4C rocket blasted off at 4:55 pm at the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province, sending the Shiyao 28B02 satellite into its preset orbit.

The satellite was also made by the Innovation Academy for Microsatellites, and it will be used to measure and survey space environmental elements and demonstrate new technologies. Its predecessor, Shiyao 28B01, was lifted off by the same rocket model from Xichang on July 3.

The Long March 4C, also a product of the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, has a liftoff weight of 250 tons and is mainly used to send satellites to sun-synchronous orbit.