



New depths

British documentary puts the spotlight on undersea stars

[WORLD, PAGE 7](#)

HK welcomes giant rubber duck and its friend

[PHOTOHK, PAGE 12](#)

Latest moves

Beijing shows mark start of return tour for US dance company [LIFE, PAGE 9](#)

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China launches 1st plate-shaped satellite

By **ZHAO LEI**
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

China launched the nation's first plate-shaped satellite into space on Friday.

Developed by researchers at the Harbin Institute of Technology in Heilongjiang province, the Longjiang 3 experimental communications satellite was lifted by a Kuaizhou 1A solid-propellant carrier rocket, which blasted off at 10:35 am from its launch vehicle at the Juquan Satellite Launch Center in the country's northwestern desert, according to China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp, the rocket's maker.

The mission marked the 20th flight of the Kuaizhou 1A model and the type's second launch this year.

According to Harbin Institute of Technology, Longjiang 3 is tasked with demonstrating advanced technologies in space-based high-speed communications and a plate-shaped satellite platform.

The new satellite incorporates several cutting-edge technologies such as a new method of high-speed communications between low-orbit satellites and ground control.

Its trial run will help researchers accumulate data and experience that will be used in the planning and design for the mass production of plate-shaped satellites, the institute said.

In addition to the institute, GalaxySpace, a Beijing-based private satellite maker, has also announced that it has built a group of plate-shaped satellites and will launch

them in coming months.

Yang Qiaolong, a designer at GalaxySpace, said having a plate shape allows for many such satellites to be placed inside a single rocket.

"The design makes it possible to launch a lot of satellites on a mission and is suitable for the rapid deployment of satellite networks," he explained.

The 20-meter Kuaizhou 1A rocket is built by China Space Sanjiang Group in Hubei province, a CASIC subsidiary, and has a liftoff weight of about 30 metric tons. It is capable of sending 200 kilograms of payload into a sun-synchronous orbit, or 300 kg of payload into a low-Earth orbit, according to designers.

The Kuaizhou 1A and Kuaizhou 11, a larger type, are the most used solid-propellant rockets in China.