



## Riding the wave

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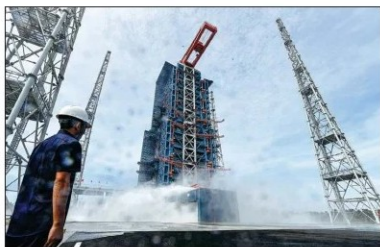
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A staff member oversees a system test at China's first commercial space launch site, located on the island province of Hainan, on June 30. PU XIAOXU / XINHUA

## China's first commercial space launch site gears up

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China's first launch complex dedicated to servicing commercial space operations is scheduled to carry out its debut mission in the coming autumn, according to its top manager.

Yang Tianliang, chairman of the Hainan International Commercial Aerospace Launch Center in Wenchang, Hainan province, told China Daily in an exclusive interview on Tuesday that if everything goes according to plan, the center's debut launch will take place around September or October.

"This is because we need time to carry out all-system rehearsals to prepare our staff for the first launch and spot possible problems. So far, most of the rehearsal tasks have been accomplished. We will make some small changes to related procedures based on the results of the rehearsals," he said.

Construction of the second of the first two launch towers was completed

in early June. Construction of the first tower was finished in late December.

In the coming weeks, workers at the complex will conduct rehearsals with a real carrier rocket, which will be used for the debut flight, after it is transported to the center, according to Yang.

He did not reveal the type of the rocket to be used in the coming mission, but sources from the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, a subsidiary of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp and one of the country's two major rocket makers, have said that the rocket will be a Long March 12, and the mission will also mark the model's first flight.

According to designers, the Long March 12 is the latest model in the Long March family and the first Chinese rocket with a diameter of 3.8 meters — wider than the 3.35-meter diameter of most Chinese rockets. It has two stages, with a combined height of more than 60 meters.

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## Space: Launch of privately built rocket likely in 2025

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Propelled by six engines fueled by liquid oxygen and kerosene, the rocket will be capable of transporting spacecraft with a combined weight of at least 10 metric tons to a low-Earth orbit, or six tons of satellites to a typical sun-synchronous orbit at an altitude of 700 kilometers.

Yang said that whether other launch missions will be carried out before the end of this year will depend on restoration work after the first launch. "In 2025, we plan to conduct the first launch of any privately built rocket at our center. We will also strive to make our facilities ready for more missions that will come next year," he said.

Yang's center is a joint venture of the Hainan provincial government and three State-owned space conglomerates — China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, China Aerospace Science and Industry

Corp and China Satellite Network Group.

Construction, which began in July 2022, was undertaken by China Aerospace Construction Group.

The No 1 launch tower is specifically tasked with servicing Long March 5 carrier rockets. The No 2 tower is capable of servicing more than 10 types of liquid-propellant carrier rockets, including those in the Long March family and models developed by private companies.

When put into operation, the complex will become the fifth ground-based launch complex in China and the first dedicated to facilitating commercial space missions.

The other launch complex in Hainan, the Wenchang Space Launch Center, is administered by the central government and primarily tasked with serving State programs. There are three more such centers in China, located in Jiuguang in Gansu province, Taiyuan in Shanxi province and Xichang in Sichuan province.