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China places 1st satellite of year into orbit

Launch kicks off what's expected to be busy year ahead for space sector

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China launched a Long March 3B carrier rocket early on Tuesday morning to deploy an experimental satellite into space, fulfilling the country's first space mission of 2025.

The rocket blasted off at 4 am from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province and soon placed the Shijian 25 satellite into its intended orbit, according to the State-owned conglomerate China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, the nation's dominant space contractor.

The company said in a news release that the satellite was built by its subsidiary Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology and is tasked with verifying orbital refueling and life-extension technologies.

The Long March 3B rocket was made by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology in Beijing, another CASC subsidiary. The mid-lift model stands at 56.3 meters and has a diameter of 3.35 meters. Propelled by liquid-propellant engines, each Long March 3B has three stages and four 2.25-meter-wide side boosters, and weighs 456 metric tons when filled with fuel.

In December, the model performed its 100th flight, becoming the first of all Chinese rocket types to achieve this feat.

So far, all of the model's 102

launches have been conducted from the Xichang spaceport.

The release noted that the Long March 3 family, which consists of the Long March 3A, 3B and 3C types, is scheduled to make more than 10 flights this year.

Last year, China carried out 68 space missions, more than any previous year. Sixty-six of the missions were successful.

China Daily has learned that 2025 will also be a busy year for the country's space sector.

The country's second interplanetary expedition, the Tianwen 2 robotic mission, is expected to be launched in summer to embark on a long journey toward an asteroid called 2016 HO3, the smallest and closest quasi-satellite to Earth, to retrieve samples from there and then bring them back to Earth.

Meanwhile, several new types of rockets developed by State-owned and private enterprises are scheduled to perform their maiden flights this year.

CAS Space, a Beijing-based rocket maker owned by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, plans to conduct the first flight of Kinetica 2, its new medium-lift, liquid-fuel rocket model, in September.

LandSpace, a leading private rocket maker in China, said the debut mission of its reusable rocket model ZQ 9 is set to take place this year. Another private industry pacesetter, Space Pioneer, aims to perform the maiden launch of the TL3 model before the year's end.



A Long March 3B carrier rocket launches the Shijian 25 satellite from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province at 4 am on Tuesday. DU XINKIN / XINHUA