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## Maiden flights of two rockets set for 2022

Space contractor says launches crucial to development of industry

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China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, the nation's leading space contractor, plans to conduct maiden flights of two new carrier rockets this year.

The Long March 6A is scheduled to make its debut flight in the coming months, while the Smart Dragon 3 is set to make its maiden mission in the third quarter, engineers said at a news conference on Wednesday.

"The company plans to conduct more than 50 rocket launches this year to transport more than 140 spacecraft to their orbit. We will complete the maiden flights of Long March 6A and other new rocket types," said Ma Tao, deputy head of space program planning at the company.

Developed by the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, the Long March 6A, a medium-lift rocket, consists of a 50-meter, liquid-propelled core booster and four solid-fuel side boosters. The core booster has a diameter of 3.35 meters and will be propelled by two 120-ton-thrust engines burning liquid oxygen and kerosene.

"Long March 6A is China's first rocket that uses both liquid- and solid-propellant engines as its main propulsion. It is very important to our development plan for future rockets," a designer at the Shanghai academy told China Daily.

The rocket will have a liftoff weight of 530 metric tons and will be tasked with transporting satellites to multiple types of orbit, including sun-synchronous, low-Earth and intermediate circular orbit.

Despite being called Long March 6A, the new model will be very different from Long March 6, which was also designed and built by the Shanghai academy.

## 140 spacecraft

to be transported through more than 50 rocket launches this year by China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp

Long March 6 is about 30 meters tall and weighs 102 tons, much smaller and lighter than the new model. It was first launched in September 2015 and has fulfilled six flights.

The Smart Dragon 3, the second in the Smart Dragon family to enter service, is being manufactured at the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology in Beijing, said Long Wei, deputy project manager of the rocket.

"Its first mission will be based on a launch platform at sea, and we want to launch two to three Smart Dragon 3s this year," he said. "In 2023, we plan to make five flights of this rocket."

With a diameter of 2.64 meters and a liftoff weight of 140 metric tons, the rocket will become the largest and most powerful in China's solid-propellant rocket fleet. It will be capable of sending multiple satellites with a combined weight of 1.5 tons to a sun-synchronous orbit at an altitude of 500 kilometers and can be launched on the ground or at sea.

Smart Dragon 3 will be suitable for clients who wish to launch large numbers of their satellites within a short period of time to establish space-based commercial networks as soon as possible, Long said.

Smart Dragon 1, the first model in the family, had its debut flight in August 2019 from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Northwestern China. It is 19.5 meters tall, has a diameter of 1.2 meters and weighs 23.1 tons.