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Long March 8A carrier rocket makes successful debut

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China conducted the debut flight of its Long March 8A carrier rocket on Tuesday afternoon, transporting a group of satellites to space, according to China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

The space industry conglomerate said in a news release that the rocket blasted off at 5:30 pm from the Wenchang Space Launch Site, a coastal spaceport in Hainan province, and soon placed the payloads — the second group of low-orbit satellites in China's State-owned internet network — into their preset orbit.

The launch marked the 559th flight mission of the Long March carrier rocket series.

After the mission, Long March 8A has become the 18th operating member in the Long March family, the pillar of China's space programs.

Designed and built by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, a subsidiary of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, the Long March 8A is 50.5 meters tall, and has a liftoff weight of 371 metric tons and a liftoff thrust of about 480 tons.



A Long March 8A carrier rocket awaits launch at the Wenchang Space Launch Site in Hainan province on Tuesday. The rocket blasted off at 5:30 pm, sending a group of satellites into their preset orbit.

YUAN CHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

The model is mainly tasked with deploying satellites to sun-synchronous orbits, and is capable of transporting payloads weighing as much as 7 tons to a typical sun-synchronous orbit with an altitude of 700 kilometers.

Song Zhengyu, a senior rocket

scientist at the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology who led the rocket model's design work, said on Tuesday that the new type is based on the Long March 8 configuration, with the same designs for the first core stage and side boosters.

The newly developed parts on the Long March 8A are its second core stage and payload fairing, he said, adding that it can use two types of payload fairing, with a diameter of 4.2 meters and of 5.2 meters, which means it has more space for satellites.

The new rocket model also incorporates several technical improvements, including a modified engine with stronger thrust, better servo devices and an optimized top structure with lighter weight, according to Song.

The Long March 8 model was first launched in December 2020 from the Wenchang Space Launch Site. So far, it has carried out three flight missions.

In the near future, the Long March 8A will be used to deploy large numbers of satellites for China's massive space-based internet networks, Song said, adding that all of its launches will take place at the Wenchang Space Launch Site and the Hainan International Commercial Aerospace Launch Center, which is also located in Wenchang.

China now has multiple internet satellite networks under construction, but keeps low-key about those projects.