

China to build new rocket series

October 31 2007

China, encouraged by its first lunar orbiter launch, plans to build a new series of bigger rockets to carry heavier satellites, it was reported Wednesday.

The country's plans, reported by China Daily, also will include a new launch center. The new Long March 5 carrier rockets, which can also launch space stations, will be built in the northern coastal city of Tianjin, while the launch center will be located in the southernmost province of Hainan.

The report said the new rockets will be able to carry up to 25 tons to near-Earth orbits, up from the current 9 tons, and 14 tons to geosynchronous orbits, up from the current 5 tons. Tianjin was chosen so the huge rockets, which cannot be transported by road or rail, can be ferried by sea.

The lunar orbiter launched last week used a Long March 3-A rocket.

The cost of the project was not disclosed but is expected to run in the billions. The new launch center is to be completed by 2012, allowing the larger rockets to go into service the following year.

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Citation: China to build new rocket series (2007, October 31) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

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