

# Russia launches key satellite on second attempt

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File picture shows a Soyuz-2 rocket prior to launch. Russia on Saturday successfully launched a satellite vital to the deployment of its own navigation system after the failure of an earlier attempt prompted the Kremlin to sack two top space officials

Russia on Saturday successfully launched a satellite vital to the deployment of its own navigation system after the failure of an earlier attempt prompted the Kremlin to sack two top space officials.

The Federal Space Agency said in a statement that the high-tech Glonass-K [satellite](#) reached its intended orbit about four hours after blasting off on top a Soyuz-2 rocket from Russia's northern Plesetsk launchpad.

"We have established and are maintaining steady telemetry

communications with the space craft," a spokesman for the defence ministry's space forces told the Interfax news agency.

"The on-board systems of the Glonass-K satellite are functioning normally," the official said.

The launch was watched closely by Russian space and military officials after the last attempt to put three Glonass satellites in orbit failed spectacularly on December 5.

The three orbiters would have completed Russia's own navigation system and enabled the military to finally target its missiles from space -- a technology that has long been available to NATO countries.

But an error prevented the Russian craft from reaching its set distance from Earth and the satellites ended up plummeting into the Pacific off the US state of Hawaii.

A furious President Dmitry Medvedev fired two top space officials after a probe placed the blame on a simple fuel miscalculation.

The three satellites would have completed a Glonass system whose research had been started by the Soviet Union in 1976 before being interrupted and then picked up again by the country's president-turned premier Vladimir Putin.

The country's de facto leader has vowed to place Glonass readers on every car made in Russia by 2012 and hailed the system as an example of how the country can claw back its Soviet-era technological might.

Russia refuses to use the [Global Positioning System](#) (GPS) developed in the United States out of fears that its military's access to the technology might be cut off in times of war.

December's setback forced Russia to delay the Glonass system's deployment by at least one year and highlighted the persistent problems plaguing an industry that was once the pride of the Soviet Union.

Glonass needs 24 functional orbiters to successfully cover the globe and start receiving its first commercial clients.

The latest launch brings the satellite total to 27. But the system is still not working on a world scale because four of the craft have been undergoing repairs.

The accident prompted Russia to shift its strategy and decide to put up only one satellite whose potential failure would not bear the 2.5 billion ruble (\$85 million) price tag of December's mishap.

But Saturday's success prompted the head of the Federal Space Agency to announce Russia was moving back to multiple satellite launches that should complete the global system by the end of the year.

"Everything should go smoothly now," Federal Space Agency chief Anatoly Perminov told ITAR-TASS.

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