

Russia launches UK telecom satellites into space

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A Soyuz rocket blasted off from the Vostochny cosmodrome in Russia's Far East on Friday carrying 36 UK telecommunications and internet satellites, the Roscosmos space agency said.

The launch was the first and only one to take place from the cosmodrome this year, Roscosmos told AFP.

The rocket took off at 1226 GMT, Roscosmos said, carrying satellites made by the British-based company OneWeb.

Originally planned for April, the launch was delayed after OneWeb collapsed and was forced to declare bankruptcy.

Last month, the UK government and Indian telecommunications giant Bharti took control of the company, investing \$500 million a piece.

The London-headquartered company is working to complete the construction of a constellation of low earth orbit satellites providing enhanced broadband and other services to countries around the world.

OneWeb's first six satellites were launched by a Russian-made Soyuz rocket from the space centre in Kourou in French Guiana in February 2019.

The company launched 34 more in February this year from the Baikanour launch site in Kazakhstan, then another 34 in March.

OneWeb plans for its global commercial internet service to be operational by 2022, supported by some 650 satellites.

"Today's launch will be the first fully commercial spacecraft launch from the Vostochny cosmodrome," Roscosmos said.

"It will also be the first launch operated by the European launch services provider Arianespace for the [company](#) OneWeb from the first Russian civilian spaceport."

The Vostochny [launch](#) site is one of the country's most important space projects, designed to reduce reliance on the Baikonur space centre Russia currently rents from Kazakhstan.

Its construction has for years been tainted by multiple controversies including corruption, and the project has been consistently behind schedule.

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