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Russia to Launch Starlink Rival Later This Year, Roscosmos Chief Says

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Russia's space agency plans to launch its first batch of satellite internet terminals later this year in a bid to rival Elon Musk's Starlink network, Roscosmos chief Dmitry Bakanov said Thursday.

"The first launch is scheduled for the end of this year," Bakanov told the state-run TASS news agency, adding that the mission would carry 16 satellites. "Just like how Starlink was deployed."

The Rassvet low-orbit satellites, developed by Russian aerospace firm Bureau 1440, are designed to provide broadband internet coverage. More than 900 are expected to be launched by 2035, with commercial services involving over 250 satellites planned to begin in 2027.

On Wednesday, Bakanov had said Roscosmos would begin regularly deploying those satellites in December of this year.

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Rassvet is part of a broader Russian space development program valued at 4.4 trillion rubles ($57 billion) and endorsed by President Vladimir Putin last week.

Starlink terminals have been key to Ukraine's battlefield communications since Russia's 2022 invasion. Kyiv has accused Russian troops of using Starlink devices obtained illicitly from third countries.

Putin first announced a Starlink competitor, Sfera, in 2018, but that project was scrapped amid sanctions on Roscosmos.

Roscosmos launched three satellites under the Rassvet-1 project in June 2023, under former director Yury Borisov, who was dismissed in February following a string of failures and stalled programs.

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