

China launches 20th Beidou navigation satellite

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Beijing: China launched a new-generation satellite into orbit that will support its global navigation and positioning network on Wednesday.

Launched from Xichang Satellite Launch Center in the southwestern province of Sichuan, the satellite was boosted by a Long March-3B carrier rocket, Xinhua news agency reported.

It was the 20th satellite for the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS), and puts China one step closer to providing an alternative to the US-operated GPS.

According to a statement from the center, for the first time, the satellite featured a hydrogen atomic clock. A series of tests related to the clock and a new navigation-signal system will be undertaken.

Named after the Chinese term for the plough or the Big Dipper constellation, the Beidou project was formally launched in 1994.

The first Beidou satellite was not launched until 2000.

China plans to expand the Beidou services to most of the countries covered in its "Belt and Road" initiative by 2018, and offer global coverage by 2020.

- IANS