China launches orbiter for navigation system: state media

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China launched an orbiter into space early Sunday, the latest stage in the development of its own satellite navigation system, state media said.

The orbiter, launched at about 00:12 am (1612 GMT Saturday) was the third orbiter that China has launched for its Beidou Navigation System, Xinhua news agency said.

"(The orbiter) will join another two already in orbits to form a network which will eventually have a total of 35 satellites, capable of providing global navigation service to users around the world around 2020.

"According to plan, the Beidou system will provide navigation, time signal and short message services in (the) Asian and Pacific region around 2012."

The launch took place from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in southwestern Sichuan province.

State media have previously said Beidou will enable military and civilian users from China to find their way anywhere in the world, removing the dependence on foreign systems.

The Beidou Navigation System is seen as a rival not just of the US-developed Global Positioning System (GPS) but also the European Union's Galileo Positioning System and Russia's Global Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS).

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