

Japan launches satellite in bid for super accurate GPS system

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The Michibiki system can cover the Asia-Oceania region and works with the US-operated Global Positioning System, a satellite of which is pictured

Japan successfully launched a satellite Thursday as part of a broader effort to build a homegrown geolocation system that boosts the accuracy of car navigation systems and smartphone maps to mere centimetres.

An H-IIA rocket blasted off Thursday morning from the Tanegashima

space centre in southern Japan carrying the "Michibiki" No.2 satellite, which was later released into [orbit](#).

"The launch was a success," a Cabinet Office spokeswoman said.

Satellite geolocation systems, initially designed for the US military, now power countless civilian applications, from [car navigation](#) to internet browsing on mobile phones.

Japan relies on the US-operated Global Positioning System (GPS). Thursday's launch was part of a broader plan to build a domestic version with four satellites focusing on the country and wider region.

The first satellite was put into orbit in 2010 and the third and fourth are to be launched by March 2018 to start the service.

The Japan-built system will still need to operate in tandem with GPS.

Though GPS is widely used in Japan, having supplementary satellites is important in a country where mountainous terrain and high buildings may interfere with its signals.

Michibiki, meaning guidance in Japanese, can cover the Asia-Oceania region and is intended for civilian use.

"After we establish the four-[satellite](#) network, its use can expand into self-driving cars, agriculture, construction and other fields," Yosuke Tsuruho, a state minister in charge of space policy, told reporters, according to Jiji Press.

Japan plans to boost the number of its satellites in orbit to seven by around 2023.

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