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## Satellites launched to upgrade Beidou network

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China launched two satellites into orbit on Tuesday morning for its Beidou Navigation Satellite System, according to the China Satellite Navigation Office.

The satellites were carried by a Long March 3B rocket that lifted off at 11:26 am from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center in Sichuan province and were deployed into a medium-Earth orbit. They are the 13th group of third-generation Beidou satellites operating in medium-Earth orbits and the first deployed in such an orbit since the completion of the Beidou global system, the office said in a news release.

The two spacecraft will come online after a period of in-orbit technical verification, it said.

Compared with their predecessors in medium-Earth orbits, the new craft features better capabilities in terms of messaging capacity, timing accuracy and equipment automation, the release said, noting that their service will improve the Beidou system's reliability and functions.

Pang Zhihao, an expert on space exploration technology who worked at the China Academy of Space Technology for decades, said that the addition of new satellites with upgraded capabilities promises a long life and higher stability for Beidou.

"Such a vast space-based network like Beidou needs technological and technical upgrades and replacement of old hardware on a regular basis. Sending new satellites to replace the old or work as

backups is very necessary and will enable Beidou to stay in good condition," he explained.

China will continue to improve the coverage and accuracy of Beidou's navigation, positioning and timing services, according to Pang.

Beidou is China's largest civilian satellite system and one of four global navigation networks, along with the United States' GPS, Russia's GLONASS and the European Union's Galileo.

Since 2000, a total of 62 Beidou satellites, including the first four experimental ones, have been lifted on 46 Long March 3 series rockets from Xichang.

In July 2020, the system began providing full-scale global services.

There are nearly 50 Beidou satellites in active service, including the latest pair.

In another development, China launched a Long March 11 carrier rocket on Tuesday morning off the coast of Yangjiang in Guangdong province, sending three experimental satellites into space, according to State-owned conglomerate China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

The company said in a news release that the rocket blasted off at 6:39 am from a launch service ship to transport the Shiyuan 24C series satellites into their preset orbits.

It was the eighth sea-based launch of Chinese rockets and the second to be made from the South China Sea.

Developed by the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, the Shiyuan 24C satellites are tasked with carrying out space technology tests, the news release said.