

New airport extends links to Panzhihua

An Airbus A320 landed at the Panzhihua Airport at 9:15 am on Saturday after a 70-minute flight from Chengdu, the provincial capital of Southwest China's [Sichuan](#) Province.

Although relatively short, the journey was significant, said Party chief Zhang Chengming of the city of Panzhihua, as it marked the opening of the airport after more than three years' construction.

Work on the airport, which is 1,976 metres above sea level, began in June 2000. Costing nearly 1.1 billion yuan (US\$133 million), it can handle Boeing 737 and Airbus 320 planes. The airport has initially been linked to [Beijing](#), [Shanghai](#), [Chongqing](#), Chengdu and Guangzhou.

Located at the juncture of the Jinsha and Yalong rivers on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, Panzhihua is the country's major steel, energy, vanadium and titanium base.

The airport's opening will give a major boost to the land-locked city's economic development, said Xiao Lijun, a senior publicity official of the city.

Sub-standard traffic links have hindered the city's growth as it takes about 14 hours to reach Chengdu and more than two days to reach Beijing from Panzhihua.

Also on Saturday, the five-day Panzhihua International Yangtze Drifting Festival kicked off.

Sponsored by the Sichuan provincial government, the Ministry of Water Conservation, the State Sports Administration, the State Environmental Protection Administration and the State Tourism Administration, the event has attracted 65 teams from home and abroad.

They are here attending a rubber-boat drifting contest along the Jinsha River, an upper reach section of the Yangtze.

"Twenty-three teams consist of women and 14 teams consist of foreign nationals," Xiao said.

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