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Korea seeks to land on Mars by 2045

President unveils roadmap for space economy

By Nam Hyun-woo
namh@koreatimes.co.kr

Korea will launch a space mission to Mars no later than 2045, according to a roadmap for the nation's space mission unveiled by President Yoon Suk-yeol on Monday.

"A country having a space mission will lead the world economy and be able to resolve challenges human beings are facing," Yoon said during an event to announce the country's roadmap for the space economy at the JW Marriott Hotel in Seoul.

The space economy refers to the economy beyond our planet, including exploring deep space, extracting resources that are rare on Earth and developing technologies necessary for space exploration.



President Yoon Suk-yeol speaks at an event to unveil South Korea's space economy roadmap at JW Marriott hotel in southern Seoul, Monday. Yonhap

"The dream of becoming a powerhouse in space is not distant. It will be an opportunity and hope for children and the youth," he added.

As part of the roadmap, Korea aims to develop within the next five years an engine for a launch vehi-

cle that can fly to the moon. Korea plans to have its spacecraft land on the Moon and begin mining lunar resources in 2032, and then land on Mars in 2045, when the country will celebrate its 100th anniversary of independence from Japanese colonial occupation.

To facilitate this roadmap, the government has set policy goals to assist the exploration missions to the moon and Mars, develop space technology and related industries, train experts, bolster national security through space and lead international cooperation for space programs.

To carry out these goals, the president will chair the national space committee and the government will also establish the Korea Aerospace Administration (KASA).

The Ministry of Science and ICT said it launched a team dedicated to setting up KASA and began drawing up specific missions that the administration should pursue

as well as strategies for launch vehicles, satellite technologies, space resources development and other goals.

Following the team's launch, the government will table a special act in the first quarter of next year calling for the establishment of KASA. If the bill is passed by the National Assembly in the second quarter, the administration will begin operations within that year.

"Korea has been showcasing its potential in space programs with its recent launches of the Nuri rocket and the Danuri lunar orbiter, and it is time for the government to assist its space ambitions by setting up national aerospace governance," First Vice Minister of Science and ICT Oh Tae-seog said.

Korea's efforts until now to strengthen its presence in space have been showing desirable outcomes this year, ushering in a new era of space exploration for the country.

EDITORIAL

Space command for USFK

Care must be taken to not cause backlash from China

U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) will incorporate a component command of the U.S. Space Force (USSF) by year's-end to tackle potential military provocations from North Korea. It will be the second space command to be established outside the U.S. mainland, following the U.S. Space Forces, Indo-Pacific, launched under the umbrella of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command on Nov. 22.

The U.S. military, in its recently unveiled National Security Strategy, said the launch of the new space command is to realize all-domain integrated deterrence. Another space force will also be set up in the Middle East in December. "Our approach requires the joint force to think, act and operate differently by synchronizing our operations, re-aligning our posture, and advancing our war-fighting capabilities," said Adm. John Aquilino, commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, during a ceremony marking the USSF component launch.

The USSF was founded in 2019 with the mission of detecting and tracing air vehicles and conducting space and cyber wars against missile attacks. Subsequently, the U.S. has been stepping up its efforts to host the space command in USFK, proving it is seriously countering North Korea's series of launches of ballistic missiles.

On Nov. 18, North Korea fired a Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which can, presumably, reach the U.S. mainland, prompting the U.S. to hasten plans to launch the space command at the USFK. Concerns are growing that the recent move will possibly incorporate USFK into

the U.S.-initiated missile defense (MD) system and entangle South Korea in the escalating superpower rivalry between the U.S. and China in the Indo-Pacific area.

In fact, the U.S. noted the creation of the Space Force in 2019, was closely related to the MD system as it is aimed at coping with the new style of "future war" against potential missile offensives from China and Russia. The new MD plan was reminiscent of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), nicknamed the "Star Wars program," which was pursued under former President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

China has already shown an allergic reaction to the MD system when, for instance, USFK attempted to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in Seongju, North Gyeongsang Province, and when Seoul and Tokyo signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). South Korea, the U.S. and Japan have recently agreed to share information about North Korea's missile and nuclear programs, further alerting China. The South Korean military has been maintaining that USFK's creation of the space command is irrelevant to the MD system.

The Yoon Suk-yeol administration should recognize that the U.S. and Japan have taken different approaches to China from South Korea. China is the largest trade partner for our nation. Yet, Seoul is highly vulnerable to possible retaliations by China as seen in the case of the THAAD deployment. It is time for the Yoon government to adopt a well-conceived policy to tackle the highly sensitive security issue without triggering a backlash from Beijing.