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Man's mission to keep Jeju Island's 'doldam' tradition alive

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NK likely to launch 1st spy satellite this month: analysts

Regime seeks to strengthen intelligence capability with multiple satellites

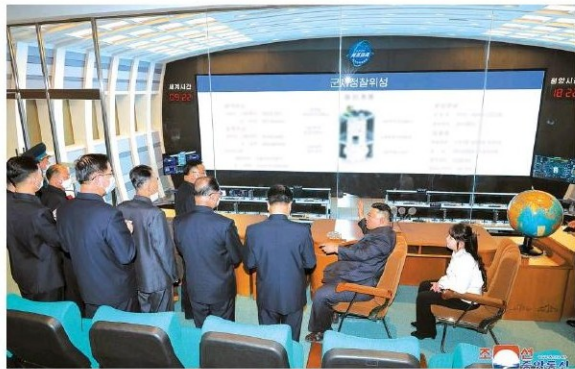
By Jung Min-ho
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North Korean leader Kim Jong-un said his regime has completed the development of its first reconnaissance satellite and told officials to expedite the preparations for launching it as planned, state media reported Wednesday.

During his Tuesday visit to North Korea's aerospace agency, Kim claimed that acquiring high levels of intelligence-gathering capability is essential to protecting its sovereignty against the United States.

Based on his previous comment made at a plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party in December 2022, experts told The Korea Times that North Korea will likely launch its satellite this month — possibly during the Seoul-Washington summit.

"According to the plan North Korea previously announced, it will launch the satellite in April. It will most likely stick to the plan unless there are serious technical problems," said Cheong Seong-chang, an expert on North Korea at the Sejong Institute, a think tank.



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, along with his daughter Ju-ae, visits the National Aerospace Development Administration in Pyongyang, Tuesday, in this photo provided by the North's official Korean Central News Agency. **Yonhap**

"With advanced satellites, North Korea would be able to more precisely strike key military facilities, such as the United States Army garrison in Pyeongtaek, which is a grave threat to South Korea and the U.S."

Kim justified the technological development as the North's "sovereign and legitimate right to self-defense." He also said his regime plans to send "multiple spy satel-

lites" into orbit in the long run, as it strives to become a "world-class space power."

North Korea's previous missile and rocket tests have suggested that it is capable of sending satellites into space, but questions remain over whether it possesses the technology required to make a functional, useful satellite for military purposes.

"Whether the North's satellite can

provide high-resolution images as it should has not been verified," said Cha Du-hyeon, a senior researcher at the Asian Institute for Policy Studies, a think tank. "But the important thing is that North Korea has been implementing what it said it would, sending South Korea and the U.S. the message that it is making progress on its plans."

A reconnaissance satellite is among the new weapons systems that Kim

had vowed to build. Others include a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile and a nuclear-powered submarine. Just last week, the North claimed it successfully test-launched a solid-propellant long-range missile, which is more difficult to detect than a liquid-fuel one.

Much of the North's weapons capabilities remain uncertain. Yet Gen. Paul LaCamera, commander of the U.S. Forces Korea, warned on Tuesday that it is "developing capabilities that reach beyond Seoul, Tokyo and Washington, D.C.," as he spoke before U.S. lawmakers.

"The Korean War taught us that we must always be ready and forward-postured with our allies to ensure continued peace and stability on the peninsula," he said.

The same day, John Hill, deputy assistant secretary of defense for space and missile defense, said a nuclear attack by Pyongyang on the U.S. would be met with immediate nuclear retaliation.

All these weapons tests and aggressive rhetoric suggest a tense week ahead, with President Yoon Suk Yeol preparing for a summit with U.S. President Joe Biden in Washington on April 26.

Tensions have been intensifying on the Korean Peninsula since April 7 as Pyongyang stopped responding to routine cross-border phone calls through the inter-Korean liaison office and military communication lines.