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## NK may have delayed spy satellite launch due to technical issues

*Experts believe regime still far from developing functional spy satellite*

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Pyongyang said on Tuesday that it will launch its first military reconnaissance satellite in two weeks to keep track of the U.S.' "reckless" military activities.

The announcement means the ambitious plan of North Korea, which was preparing to finish all the necessary preparation by the end of April, has officially been postponed. Experts told The Korea Times

that technical problems might have been the cause of the delay. Given the small size of the satellite, shown in photos released by the regime, and the complexity of the project, they also said North Korea still seems far from developing a functional, useful satellite for military purposes.

"Given that, unlike April, there are no major political events scheduled for June, it is possible that North Korea delayed the launch due to technical issues," Shin Jong-woo, a researcher at the Korea Defense and Security Forum, a think tank, said.

Park Won-gon, a professor of North Korean studies at Ewha Womans University, agreed.

"As we have seen through our own (Nuri rocket) space project,

Analysis



the complexity of developing a satellite is enormous. For the North, it would have been even more so, with an additional challenge of securing all the essential materials and parts amid sanctions," Park said.

In comments released by the North's official Korean Central News Agency, Ri Pyong-chol, one of the North's top military officers, said having space-based reconnaissance is expected to enable the military to monitor in real-time the "dangerous military acts" of the U.S. and its allies. He justified Pyongyang's satellite development by blaming Washington's "hostile air espionage activities" conducted over his country.

However, views differ among experts on where North Korea's real intention lies. Some think that its satellite development is only a cover for advancing its missile capabilities.

During a press conference, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said, "(North Korea's) satellite launches incorporate technology that is almost identical and compatible with those used for ballistic missiles, and regardless of the designation used by North Korea, we believe that the one planned for this time also uses ballistic missile technology."

Echoing that view, Shin said North Korea's satellite looks "too small" for advanced functions.

"The pictures released by North Korea show that it appears to be

a little bigger than one meter long and not equipped with SAR, (synthetic-aperture radar) which helps provide quality images even under bad weather conditions," he said. "I suspect that it may be part of North Korea's missile development efforts and I doubt that the satellite would be able to function properly."

North Korea's satellite launch would use the same long-range missile technology prohibited by U.S. Security resolutions, which has drawn criticism from Seoul, Washington and Tokyo.

However, based on North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's past comments about new weapons under development, Park believes the regime is serious about its space vision.

"North Korea has test-launched

its missiles many times without prior notice to any country. Yet it issued notice (to Japan) this time and in the past ahead of satellite launches. Additionally, there is little North Korea would gain from the satellite launch in terms of developing ICBM capabilities as it only needs to acquire atmospheric reentry technologies, which the satellite test would not help," he said.

North Korea proved in the past that it had the ability to deliver a satellite into space, but the scholar said the capabilities of its satellites remain highly questionable.

"The regime would declare success if it successfully sends it into space. But it would require further analysis to know what that really means," he said.