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## NK seeks to portray rocket as science effort by admitting failure

*Regime hides information about botched project from its own people*

By Jung Min-ho  
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North Korea's unusually prompt admission of the failure of its purported reconnaissance satellite launch shows the regime's effort to characterize the project as a scientific endeavor and not part of its missile program as suspected by Seoul, Washington, Japan and many other governments, according to experts, Thursday.

Less than three hours after Wednesday's failed rocket launch, North Korea admitted the failure and vowed in a message to the world to step up efforts to place a new one in orbit soon, although it did not disclose the botched attempt to its own people.

"The regime appeared to highlight that it has the technology required for a satellite launch and it is sincere about that effort, providing a counterargument against claims that it was just part of its weapons program," Cha Du-hyeon, a senior researcher at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, a think tank, said.

"North Korea would need to justify the rocket test as some countries are expected to push for additional sanctions or resolutions through the U.N. Security Council."

This is why Pyongyang, in a rare move, released pictures of the failed launch, said Cheong Seong-chang, an expert on North Korea at the Sejong Institute, a think tank.

"In the photos, the rocket projectile looks clearly different from the one used for the ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) tests," he noted.

Such efforts can also be observed in the comments of Kim Yo-jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. She said, Thursday, that her country's efforts to acquire space-based reconnaissance capabilities are its sovereign right and dismissed U.N. Security Council resolutions

that prohibit the North from any test involving ballistic missile technology.

"If the DPRK's (North Korea) satellite launch should be particularly censured, the U.S. and all other countries, which have already launched thousands of satellites, should be denounced. This is nothing but sophism of self-contradiction," she said. "It is certain that the DPRK's military reconnaissance satellite will be correctly put in space orbit in the near future and start its mission."

However, that ambition might not materialize. Technological advancements are hard to achieve in a short period and a second satellite launch failure would be a heavy — possibly too risky — political burden to the regime, experts say.

"If what North Korea claimed about the launch test was all true, that means its satellite was destroyed along with the launch vehicle. Thus, it needs to make another satellite as well as a new, more advanced vehicle in order to succeed, which will take quite a long time," Cha said. "If North Korea conducts another test in the near future as it said it would, it was likely that the North tested only the vehicle, which would reinforce suspicion that the launch was part of its effort to advance its ICBM technology."

He said North Korea's second satellite test will likely end in "success," not because it would achieve a noteworthy improvement in technology by then, but because it would focus more on putting satellites in space — the ability the regime proved it had through past rocket tests.

Cheong agreed, saying it will be difficult for the North to conduct another test any time soon.

"It is possible that North Korea would push for the test just before its Day of Victory (July 27) or founding anniversary (Sept. 9). But most likely, it is expected to be carried out at the end of 2023 or the beginning of the next year," he said.

An official at the Ministry of Unification told The Korea Times that no information about the rocket launch failure was so far published in the media which ordinary North Koreans have access to.