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Hanwha faces protests over rocket facility location

By Park Joo-hyuk
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Residents from Goheung County in South Jeolla Province held a rally in front of Hanwha Group's headquarters in Seoul, Tuesday, to condemn Hanwha Aerospace's latest decision to establish a rocket assembly facility in the county's neighboring city of Suncheon.

The residents threatened to interfere with Hanwha Aerospace's launches of space vehicles at the Naro Space Center in Goheung, unless the company retracts its decision.

"I condemn Hanwha Aerospace's decision, which contradicts the government's plan to foster an industrial cluster for development of space launch vehicles," said Rep. Kim Seung-nam of the main opposition Democratic Party of Korea, who represents Goheung residents. "I'm considering proposing a shutdown or relocation of the Naro Space Center, which has made no contributions to the regional economy."

Last Friday, the Hanwha Aerospace affiliate announced its selection of Suncheon as the venue for the rocket assembly facility, which will be built on 23,140 square meters of land by 2025. The company plans to invest around 50 billion won (\$38 million)



Hanwha Aerospace CEO
Son Joo-il



A rendered image of Hanwha Aerospace's rocket assembly facility

Courtesy of Hanwha Aerospace

in the construction.

In addition, Hanwha Aerospace said it will build a rocket components factory in South Jeolla Province once the county finishes establishing an industrial cluster for the development of space launch vehicles.

On the day of the announcement, Suncheon's city government wel-

comed the decision.

"We'd like to offer a few words of consolation toward Goheung County in South Jeolla Province and Changwon in South Gyeongsang Province, which competed with us to attract the facility," the city government said in a statement. "We will make efforts for

Hanwha to grow into a bigger company and contribute to our region and Korea."

Goheung County said in a statement on Sunday that the company's decision was "incomprehensible."

"We hope Hanwha will convince our residents in the near future by disclosing the specifics of its invest-

ments in our county," the county's government said.

Changwon, home to the Hanwha Aerospace headquarters, also expressed its disappointment in the company's decision.

When the three regions were vying to attract Hanwha Aerospace's rocket assembly facility, South Jeol-

la Province sided with Goheung in an apparent attempt to prevent the competition between the province's two municipal governments from benefiting Changwon.

In March, Kim Jong-gap, director of the strategic industry bureau of South Jeolla Province, told a local news outlet that Goheung is the optimal place to establish the rocket assembly facility, drawing a backlash from Suncheon, which asked the provincial government to remain neutral.

After Hanwha Aerospace announced its decision, South Jeolla Province welcomed the decision.

"The province will continue making efforts to foster an industrial complex for the development of space launch vehicles," the province said in a statement.

In addition to the conflict over Hanwha Aerospace's facility, political disputes have continued over the Korea Space and Aeronautics Administration, which is considered to be the Korean equivalent of the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

President Yoon Suk Yeol pledged to set up the administration in Sacheon, South Gyeongsang Province, where Korea Aerospace Industries is located.

However, lawmakers representing residents of South and North Chungcheong provinces and Daejeon, home to the Korea Aerospace Research Institute, proposed an alternative bill earlier this month, in an apparent attempt to prevent the new space agency's establishment in Sacheon.