

July 23, 2015

DPRK Updates Satellite Launching Station

On July 22, South Korean media outlets released reports on the completion of modifications to North Korea's long-range missile launch facility in Tongchang-ri, North Pyongan Province. The site, called the Sohae Satellite Launching Station, is located close to North Korea's northern border with China. The Sohae site was believed to be designed as a long-range ballistic missile and space booster test facility with R&D and support facilities.

- The newly reported modifications expanded the 50-meter-tall launcher built in 2013 to an estimated 67-meter-tall launcher. Imagining analysis by Johns Hopkins University's 38 North indicates modification also included the construction of a new support building at the east end of the launch pad, as well as a new rail tunnel terminus and a new platform that appears to move along rails from the new building to the launch pad.
- With its newly improved facilities, North Korea is expected to be capable of launching a long-range missile with an estimated range of 13,000 kilometers and with a length that is twice as long as 30-meter-long Unha-3 that was launched in 2012. Some speculates that North Korea might be launching a long-range missile to mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Korean Workers Party on October 10, 2015.
- Construction at this site first began in 2001 and is reported to have been completed by early 2011. The first launch from this site occurred in April 13, 2012 with the launch of a Unha-3 rocket, carrying a Kwangmyongsong-3 satellite to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of North Korea's first leader, Kim Il-Sung. However, the launch failed to reach orbit and left a trail of debris in the West Sea. Subsequently in December 12, 2012 North Korea launched a second Unha-3 rocket, successfully putting a Kwangmyongsong-3 Unit 2 satellite into orbit.
- Although media reports have cited "government" as its sources, there has not yet been an official release of information by the South Korean government confirming the Sohae launch site improvement as of July 22, 2015.

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