

DPRK LAUNCHES ROCKET TO IMPROVE THE ECONOMY

The April 5 edition of the pro-North Korean Choson Sinbo carried an article proclaiming that the launch of a communications satellite on Sunday marked “the beginning of the plan for the people,” and that “North Korea’s space launch was real testimony to the foundation and guarantee of the construction of a Great and Prosperous Nation, as laid out by the Great Leader.”

According to the article, “the multi-stage rocket technology used to propel the satellite into space emphasizes national strength,” and “is always connected to the national strategy of creating a strong and prosperous socialist nation in which all the people live well, without an envy in the world.” The paper also emphasized the role of Kim Jong Il in preparing for the launch of the ‘Kwangmyongsong 2’, stating that the April 2009 launch, just as the launch in 1998, was thoroughly planned out.

North Korean claims that the rocket successfully boosted the satellite into orbit, however, are being countered by military and civilian experts in the United States and elsewhere. Monitors stated that the second stage of the rocket fell several hundred miles short of North Korean estimates, suggesting a failure of this middle stage, and that the third stage and payload splashed down in the Pacific Ocean.

Some point out, however, that even an unsuccessful launch could have economic benefits. The article pointed out, “Currently, North Korea’s top priority is the revival of its economy. Development of a large rocket is not unrelated to the people’s lives,” and went on to list some of the ways in which North Korea would benefit economically from its rocket program, including “the utility of each satellite put into space, civilian uses for vanguard technology emerging from rocket development, commercialization of satellite launchings, and the export of rocket technology.” The 2009 launch was more successful than the July 2006 attempt to launch a similar Taepodong-2, and the 1998 launch of a Taepodong-1, indicating that North Korea has improved its rocket technology over time.

The Kwangmyongsong 2 was labeled a “new milestone” in the construction of a Strong and Prosperous Nation, the North’s goal by 2012, and the paper stated, “the successful launch of a test communications satellite using a domestic rocket” was evidence of the practicality of “rehabilitation by one’s own effort based on science and technology” as the North’s economic revival plan. The article also stressed that the launch was successful despite attempts from the international community to “interfere”, and credited “ingenious political leadership” in Pyongyang for standing up to foreign powers.

Emphasizing the economic ‘ripple effect’ of space development, another article in the paper said that vanguard technology would be the mainstay of the Strong and Prosperous Nation, and pointed out that in many other countries, ‘spin off technology’ developed in space programs was used to improve the everyday lives of ordinary citizens. How these possible economic benefits will weigh against possible economic sanctions resulting from the latest launch has yet to be seen.