

North Korea's controversial rocket launch a failure

By Haejin Song
STAFF WRITER

In 2006, North Korea's nuclear test was considered a fizzle and in 2009, a similar fate followed their missile launch. Several days ago, North Korea thought the third time would be its charm. However, things did not go as planned.

Pyongyang announced initial plans to launch the Unha-3 rocket, "Milky Way," sometime between April 12 and April 16. Although North Korea claimed it was a satellite launch to study the country's weather and agricultural patterns, many analysts considered it to be a long-range missile test.

"North Korea attempted to launch two satellites in the past and both times they have failed," said Nicholas Miller '07, analyst with the Center for Strategic Research and Analysis, in an email interview. "While the North Korean government may claim that a satellite launch is different from a missile launch, it still requires technology that has been banned under U.N. Security resolutions 1718 and 1874."

Several images from GlobalSecurity.org showed entrances of underground tunnels at the Punggye-ri site where nuclear tests were previously conducted in 2006 and 2009. North Korea was condemned by the international community for carrying out its launches despite warnings and has made any form of possible negotiation difficult in the near future, notably with the United States.

Although North Korea had agreed to suspend its

nuclear activities in return for U.S. food aid, the deal was canceled when North Korea, shortly after the agreement, announced its rocket launch plans.

"Their efforts to launch a missile clearly demonstrates that they could not be trusted to keep their commitments," said White House National Security Council spokesperson Ben Rhodes to Reuters.

As the world kept a vigilant eye on North Korea's rocket launch, the isolated nation surprisingly welcomed 200 foreign journalists to Pyongyang for the launch and the weekend-long commemorations of Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il. According to Sky News, it was the "largest number of overseas media ever welcomed in to the reclusive state."

On April 13, North Korea carried out its plans and launched the rocket. However, the much-anticipated launch failed.

According to a U.S. official, the rocket broke apart 81 seconds after its launch and then fell into the ocean, reported CNN.

"North Korea thought they were ready (for the launch), but they weren't," said George Guo, associate professor of political science. "Most people expected the rocket launch to be symbolic but North Korea failed badly."

Although many were relieved by North Korea's failure, some are becoming apprehensive about North Korea's next step and the country's response to the rocket's embarrassing outcome.

"The possibility of an additional long-range rocket launch or a nuclear test, as well as a military provocation to

strengthen internal solidarity, is very high," a senior South Korean defense ministry official told a parliamentary hearing, reported Reuters.

"A nuclear test next month is a virtual certainty," added Marcus Noland, a North Korea expert at Peter G. Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, reported the LA Times.

What may have surprised the international community more than North Korea's rocket failure was North Korea's public acknowledgment of the unsuccessful launch.

"The earth observation satellite failed to enter its preset orbit. Scientists, technicians, and experts are now looking into the cause of the failure," reported North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency.

Under Kim Jong-Il's rule, North Korea had blatantly stressed their previous unsuccessful launches as triumphant; analysts believe North Korea's current acknowledgment to be a dramatic shift in leadership.

"Some believe, and I would probably put myself in this camp, that more than likely a power struggle is occurring within the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," said Miller.

"It could be an indication of subtle change in the North Korean leadership — in how they handle these things," said Baek Seung-joo of the Korea Institute of Defense Analyses to Reuters. "I mean it would have been unthinkable for them to admit this kind of failure in the past, something that could be seen as an international humiliation. The decision to have come out with the admission had to come from Kim Jong-un."

Deforestation in Cambodian communities

For Keyla's full article, along with slideshows of pictures from her trip to Cambodia, please see www.guilfordian.com

It's an age old saying: "sometimes we have to lose something before we appreciate it." This proves true in the case of many Cambodian villagers who have seen the forests around them disappearing for decades now.

Both legal and illegal causes have contributed to the country's mass deforestation. With the lack of government action to preserve and protect the resource, many communities have begun to fight back.

Their actions have included roadblocks, protests and patrolling through the forest to catch illegal loggers.

"Our goal is to stop the cutting down of trees," said Wutty Chut, director of the Natural Resources Protection Group, a local NGO. "If the tree falls down, it is too late."

-Keyla Beebe, sophomore
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KEYLA BEEBE/GUILFORDIAN

U.S. amps up surveillance before Iran nuclear talks

By Kate Gibson
STAFF WRITER

CIA surveillance of Iran evaded public knowledge until a bat-winged stealth surveillance drone crashed in Iran last December. Now, the Washington Post reports that this drone was one of many sent over the past three years to gather intel on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Though Iran has publicly denied using uranium enrichment facilities to advance nuclear weapons production, many still fear that Iran's resources are intended for more than just nuclear power.

To generate nuclear power, these facilities would only require uranium enriched to 3-5 percent. However, Iran has stated that it has uranium enriched to over 20 percent, which makes it eligible for nuclear weapons material.

"The only reason you would want to enrich it over (20 percent) is that you're going to make a nuclear weapon," said Robert Duncan, visiting assistant professor of political science. "So, this whole thing about, 'it's for peaceful usage (in a) nuclear power plant,' that's hogwash."

According to the Washington Post, the U.S. government had increased its intelligence efforts in order to strengthen their bargaining stance for nuclear talks with Iran.

Iran, Germany, and the five members of the U.N. Security Council met for 10 hours on April 14 to talk about the future of Iran's nuclear program, reported the Washington Post. Iran seemed open to negotiations, but officials and analysts remain skeptical.

"Iran and North Korea are two peas

in the same pod," said Duncan. "They'll agree to talk, they'll get concessions and then they'll break their promises and go back to being belligerent. It's just a shell game to stall for time. I don't think the Iranians have any intention at all of abandoning their nuclear program."

As Danish Foreign Minister Villy Soevndal told reporters, Iranian officials "are world champions in making very long negotiations lead nowhere."

At this point, analysts believe that a compromise is the only solution. One popular suggestion is allowing Iran to "continue limited low-level enrichment if it in return accepts much more intrusive U.N. nuclear inspections," reported Reuters.

However, Iran may want economic sanctions lifted sooner rather than later, specifically the trade embargos imposed by Western countries on Iran's oil. A senior Obama administration official stated that sanctions will not be lifted until Iran begins acting on its word, according to Reuters.

In any case, there are serious dangers with allowing the Iranian nuclear programs to continue in any form.

"(There is) the potential for a rogue leader to do something crazy, to launch WWII," said Duncan. "A fanatic, someone who doesn't give a poop about the people or themselves, could do something disastrous and start the nuclear ball rolling, and that's scary."

A second round of nuclear talks is scheduled for May 23 in the Iraqi capital. But until then, Duncan is not taking any chances.

"I think I'm going to build a bomb shelter in my backyard," said Duncan. "Just in case."