

S Korea to conduct 1st launch of commercial-grade satellite

April 11 2023, by Hyung-Jin Kim



In this photo provided by the Korea Aerospace Research Institute, the Nuri rocket, the first domestically produced space rocket, lifts off from a launch pad at the Naro Space Center in Goheung, South Korea, on June 21, 2022. South Korea plans to conduct its first launch of a commercial-grade satellite aboard a domestically built rocket next month as part of its space development program, officials said Tuesday, April 11, 2023. Credit: Korea Aerospace Research Institute via AP, File

South Korea plans to conduct its first launch of a commercial-grade satellite aboard a domestically built rocket next month as part of its space development program, officials said Tuesday.

South Korea's officials say its homegrown Nuri space launch vehicle has no military purposes. But some experts say the development of such rockets would eventually help the country acquire technologies needed to build bigger missiles and launch reconnaissance satellites amid animosities with rival North Korea.

In June last year, South Korea conducted its first satellite launch using the Nuri rocket. That launch involved what South Korean officials called a "performance verification" satellite mainly designed to examine the capacity of the rocket while next month's event is meant to put a commercial-grade satellite into orbit for the first time.

The Science Ministry said the rocket will blast off from the country's space launch center on a southern island on May 24. A ministry statement said it had set a backup launch date from May 25-31, in case of possible schedule changes due to weather.

The rocket will carry one main satellite called "Next Generation Small Satellite 2" and seven other smaller cube-shaped satellites. The main satellite is tasked with verifying imaging radar technology and observing cosmic radiation in near-Earth orbit, the statement said.



In this photo released by the Korea Aerospace Research Institute, the Nuri rocket is seen at the Naro Space Center in Goheung, South Korea, on March 28, 2023. South Korea plans to conduct its first launch of a commercial-grade satellite aboard a domestically built rocket next month as part of its space development program, officials said Tuesday, April 11. Credit: Korea Aerospace Research Institute via AP

Authorities have completed the assembly of the rocket's first and second stages and are conducting final environmental tests of the eight satellites that are to be placed on the rocket's third stage.

Last year's launch was the Nuri rocket's second liftoff. In its first launch in 2021, the rocket's dummy payload reached the desired altitude but failed to enter orbit. After next month's launch, South Korea plans three more Nuri rocket launches, officials said.

"The third launch of Nuri is of great significance as it is the first attempt to launch a commercial-grade satellite and the first time a private company will jointly manufacture the homegrown Nuri rocket," Oh Tae-seok, the first vice science minister, was quoted as saying in the ministry statement.

South Korea, the world's 10th largest economy, is a major producer of semiconductors, automobiles and smartphones. But its space development program lags behind that of its neighbors China, India and Japan. Since the early 1990s, South Korea has sent a series of satellites into space, but all of them involved foreign rocket technology or launch sites.

North Korea placed Earth observation satellites into orbit in 2012 and 2016, but there is no proof that either satellite has been functioning. North Korea was slapped with international sanctions because of the two launches because the U.N. views them as disguised tests of the North's banned long-range missile technology.

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