

KIM URGES MORE 'MILITARY MUSCLE'

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Overseeing preparations: Kim Jong Un looking at the monitors at the test launch of a missile on Tuesday. AP

Kim Jong Un personally oversaw the successful test of a hypersonic missile, state media said on Wednesday, and urged North Korea to press ahead with building more "strategic military muscle" despite international sanctions over its nuclear weapons programme.

Pictures in state media showed Mr. Kim using binoculars to observe the second missile launch by the nuclear-armed nation in less than a week.

Hypersonic missiles are listed among the "top priority" tasks for strategic weapons development in North Korea's five-year plan.

After the launch, Mr. Kim said North Korea must "further accelerate the efforts to steadily build up the country's strategic military muscle both in quality and quantity and further modernise the army", according to KCNA.

The Tuesday test, which came as the UN Security Council met in New York to discuss Pyongyang's weapons programme, sparked swift condemnation, with the U.S. State Department branding it a "threat... to the international community."

Third test

It was the third reported North Korean test of a hypersonic gliding missile.

North Korea's state news agency *KCNA* said the most recent test demonstrated "the superior manoeuvrability of the hypersonic glide vehicle". It also claimed it accurately hit a target some 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) away.

South Korea's military, which had cast doubt on Pyongyang's initial claims, said the missile launched on Tuesday had reached hypersonic speeds and showed clear signs of "progress" from last week's test.

The missile flew 700 kilometres (435 miles) at an altitude of about 60 kilometres (37 miles) at Mach 10 speed, Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

Hypersonic missiles travel at speeds of at least Mach 5 — five times the speed of sound — and can manoeuvre mid-flight, making them harder to track and intercept.

'Bid to modernisation'

"Everything about this test is a reminder that North Korea is all-in on a new military modernisation campaign," Ankit Panda of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said.

Meanwhile, the U.S. imposed sanctions on Wednesday on five North Koreans linked to the country's ballistic missile program. said. The Treasury Department said the five were "responsible for procuring goods for the DPRK's (North Korea's) weapons of mass destruction

and ballistic missile-related programs.”

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