

04/Sept./2008 NHK Breaking News

South Korea's foreign minister Yu Myung Hwan said in a press conference today that satellite images have confirmed that equipment which had been cut off during the nuclear disablement was being moved into Nyongbyon's 5MW nuclear reactor. ###

04/Sept./2008 NHK North Korea has begun moving nuclear equipment

The US State Department says North Korea has begun moving previously stored equipment in the Nyongbyon nuclear plant.

North Korea said last week that it had suspended disabling its nuclear facilities and would consider rebuilding its reactor. It said that the United States had failed to remove it from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism.

US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters on Wednesday that North Korea has begun moving out some previously stored equipment in the Nyongbyon nuclear plant.

But he said that he could not confirm that the North had begun to reassemble the facilities. He also said North Korea has allowed foreign nuclear experts to remain in the country.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has insisted once again that the North resume disabling its nuclear facilities.

The US chief delegate to the 6-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program, Christopher Hill, will leave for Beijing on Thursday to consult with Chinese officials over the issue.

On Wednesday, the South Korean government announced that North Korea had started rebuilding the facilities. But it did not provide any details. ###

04/Sept./2008 NHK Machimura calls for pressure on North Korea

Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura says Japan will work to apply more pressure on North Korea, so it will complete its nuclear disablement as promised. He told reporters on Thursday that he is concerned about the news that North Korea has begun moving out some previously stored equipment in the Nyongbyon nuclear plant.

Machimura said Japan is in close communication with the United States, South Korea, and other nations involved in the matter.

He said members of the six-party talks agreed that North Korea will complete its nuclear disablement by the end of October, and that they will soon come up with an agreement on ways to verify it.

He said Japan will continue its coordination with other members of the talks, and try to apply more pressure on the North, to realize these goals. ###

03/Sept./2008 NHK Foreign nuclear experts remain in N.Korea

North Korea has allowed foreign nuclear experts to remain in the country even after its announcement that it will suspend efforts toward nuclear disarmament.

North Korea said on August 26th that it had suspended disabling of its nuclear facilities in Nyongbyon because the United States had failed to remove the North from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism.

North Korea says the move is justifiable based on the agreed principle of action for action.

An official involved in the six-party nuclear talks said North Korea suspended the disabling process about a week before its announcement, and that it notified the United States of its decision.

But US nuclear experts who have been taking turns visiting North Korea since last year to help with the disabling process have been allowed to stay in the country.

In addition, officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency are reportedly continuing to inspect North Korea's nuclear facilities.

US-North Korea talks have reached a stalemate, with the United States insisting that the North agree on procedures to verify its nuclear declaration before it can be taken off the terror sponsor list.

Observers say North Korea is retaining foreign nuclear experts despite a threat to reassemble its nuclear facilities in hopes of winning concessions from the United States. ###

04/Sept./2008 AP S. Korea says N. Korea restoring nuclear complex

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) _ North Korea notified the United States that it planned to reassemble its nuclear facilities before it began moving mothballed equipment back into place this week, a South Korean official said Thursday.

North Korea informed U.S. personnel stationed at its Yongbyon nuclear plant on Tuesday and started moving some equipment disassembled from the plutonium-producing facilities out of storage Wednesday, a Foreign Ministry official said.

``They were moving some equipment to the (original) sites," said the official, citing information provided by the United States. He did not say what the equipment was, and spoke on condition of anonymity, citing the issue's sensitivity.

``This is a clear violation of the six-party agreement," he said, referring to a disarmament pact that North Korea reached with the United States and four other nations last year. The official said South Korea would try to persuade North Korea to reverse its action.

In Tokyo, Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura said Japan was in close contact with the U.S. and South Korea on the development.

``We are aware that (North Korea) is engaged in an activity to take some of the key equipment out of storage, and we are concerned about the situation," he said.

North Korea had publicly warned of such a move last week after halting work to disable the facilities at Yongbyon, including its main nuclear reactor, claiming Washington had failed to honor a pledge to remove it from a U.S. blacklist of states sponsoring terrorism under a deal reached last year.

Washington has demanded that North Korea first agree to a plan to verify an accounting of its nuclear programs it submitted in June before being taken off the list. The U.S. played down North Korea's latest actions.

“Based on what we know from the reports on the ground, you don't have an effort to reconstruct, reintegrate this equipment back into the facility,” State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said.

U.S. officials have been stationed at the Yongbyon complex to monitor the disablement work, along with officials from the U.N. nuclear watchdog.

Despite the apparent start of restoration work, North Korea has not expelled the international monitors. That may suggest its move is only a negotiating tactic meant to pressure Washington to rapidly remove it from the terror list.

The U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency said North Korea had already removed “essential” equipment from its nuclear facilities before it stopped disabling them last month, suggesting it would take some time to restore its main reactor to an operational state.

South Korean and U.S. officials have said it would take at least a year for North Korea to restart the facilities once they are completely disabled.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the U.S. wants to keep the disarmament process moving forward.

“We are expecting North Korea to live up to its obligations. And we will most certainly live up to our obligations,” she said.

South Korea's chief nuclear negotiator, Kim Sook, plans to head Friday to Beijing, where he is expected to meet his U.S. counterpart, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, to discuss the latest developments, his office said.

North Korea gave no hint Thursday of what its intentions are. Its official Korean Central News Agency was filled with stories about preparations to celebrate the 60th anniversary next week of the country's 1948 foundation.

The North conducted an underground nuclear test blast in October 2006. It later agreed with the U.S. and four other countries to disable the plant in Yongbyon, north of its capital, Pyongyang, in exchange for aid and diplomatic concessions. Work began in November last year.

But the disablement then slowed to protest a delay in aid from its negotiating partners. There was major progress in June after North Korea submitted the long-delayed accounting of its nuclear activities and destroyed its nuclear cooling tower in a show of commitment to denuclearization.

The U.S. then announced it would take North Korea off the terrorism blacklist, a coveted goal of the North's cash-strapped regime, but said it must first agree to a verification plan. ###

04/Sept./2008 Reuters

Senior South Korean and U.S. nuclear envoys will meet in Beijing on Friday to discuss North Korea's initial steps towards restarting its ageing nuclear plant that can make arms-grade plutonium, officials said on Thursday.

North Korea has taken some equipment out of storage at its Soviet-era nuclear complex in what appeared to be a sign of displeasure over sputtering six-way talks on ending its atomic programmes, U.S. officials said on Wednesday.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry late on Wednesday confirmed the North had taken steps to rebuild its Yongbyon nuclear plant and expressed regret over the move.

Last November, North Korea started taking apart the nuclear plant as a part of a disarmament-for-aid deal. Most of the disablement work has been completed and experts said it would take a year or more for the North to restart Yongbyon.

In June, the North destroyed the plant's cooling tower and this would need to be rebuilt for the reactor to function. The North said at the time that toppling the tower was a demonstration of its commitment to abide by the nuclear deal.

South Korean nuclear envoy Kim Sook will meet U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill in Beijing on Friday, South Korean foreign ministry officials said.

Some South Korean media reports said the meeting was planned for Thursday.

China has hosted the six-country nuclear talks on ending the atomic ambitions of North Korea, which conducted its first nuclear test about two years ago. U.S. inspectors are currently in Yongbyon to monitor disablement.

U.S. officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said they viewed North Korea's moves more as a negotiating tactic than a genuine effort to rebuild Yongbyon, which proliferation experts believe has produced enough plutonium for six to eight bombs.

"MOSTLY SYMBOLIC"

A U.S. counter-proliferation official said Washington had seen evidence that some parts had been moved back to their original Yongbyon site but described this as "mostly symbolic, mostly done for effect in response to the negotiations".

"It's a step designed to show that they can take more steps if they want to," said the official. Proliferation experts have said that trade sanctions placed on North Korea make it difficult for the North to acquire the parts it needs to restart Yongbyon, where some of the facilities might be beyond repair because of their age.

"There is no indication from any source that the North Koreans are in any position to actually begin operating those facilities," said Brad Glosserman, an executive director of the CSIS Pacific Forum think tank in Hawaii.

North Korea said on Aug. 26 it would stop disabling Yongbyon, about 100 km (60 miles) north of Pyongyang, and accused the United States of violating the denuclearization deal negotiated by the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States.

The North said this was in response to Washington's failure to drop it from the U.S. state sponsors of terrorism list. The United States said North Korea must first agree on a system to verify Pyongyang's disclosures about its nuclear programmes.

Analysts said the North might be trying to pressure the outgoing Bush administration, as it looks for a diplomatic successes to bolster its legacy. The North might also be thinking it can wait for a new U.S. president to try to get a better deal.

"The North Koreans have a remarkable record of misreading American politics," Glosserman said, adding the United States and other powers will not drop their demands for the North to allow them to verify the secretive state's nuclear claims.

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