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## NK NUCLEAR ROW IS REALLY ABOUT REGIONAL ENERGY SECURITY: EXPERTS

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By Lee Dong-min

The persistent nuclear suspicion directed at North Korea would have anyone balk at the idea of the communist state acquiring atomic capabilities, but a number of experts and diplomats believe the key issue at stake is its drive for energy security, which involves the use of nuclear energy.

Energy-related problems are a real threat for both Koreas and the six-party talks are an ideal vehicle to resolve them, not only for the two sides but for the whole of Northeast Asia, they say.

"Energy lies at the heart of virtually all policy approaches to the Korean Peninsula's future -- be they diplomatic, political-military, or economic in character," says Kent Calder, director of the Korea Initiative at Johns Hopkins' Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.

Calder released a study Tuesday titled "Korea's Energy Insecurities" that details North Korea's energy-security dilemma and energy options for the future.

In it, he talked about North Korea's energy needs and dilemmas, and how the state copes with its dilapidated power-generating facilities.

North Korea believes that nuclear power represents the path to self-sufficiency in terms of meeting its energy needs.

"The North's persistent efforts of the past 15 years to develop nuclear power are thus motivated by autarkic impulses much broader and more complex than simply wanting to possess nuclear weapons, although the North clearly seems to include a persistent quest for a nuclear weapons capability as well," Calder writes in his study.

A former US diplomat who was deeply involved in negotiations with North Korea at the outbreak of the 1992 nuclear crisis said that he, too, was struck by how "gripped" North Koreans were about their energy needs.

North Koreans came to the negotiating table with very precise, specific demands in terms

of energy, he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

""This always suggested to me maybe the principal reason for (the North) going nuclear is nuclear weapons, but nuclear power is important in its own right,"" he said.

""Should a viable solution to the North Korean nuclear problem, in all its dimensions, finally be achieved, much potential exists for continuing six-party cooperation to address the DPRK's energy problems,"" Calder argues.

DPRK, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, is North Korea's official name.

Members of the six-party talks, South and North Korea, the U. S., China, Russia and Japan, all complement one another in addressing Pyongyang's energy issues in broad regional context,"" Calder says.

The regional context is that the whole of Northeast Asia is in dire need of securing a solid supply of energy.

Four of the top ten primary energy consumers are in Asia -- China, Japan, India and South Korea.

""Their energy consumption patterns affect not only the world market but also possibilities for cooperation, or conflict, closer to home,"" says Calder.

Insecurity about the steady supply of energy is of special concern to the region because of pervasive resource shortages and the lack of geopolitical leverage to command such resources that powerful nations like the US enjoy, according to Calder.

""... The resolution of Korea's energy insecurities has an important regional dimension that transcends the narrow economic considerations involved,"" he says.

""The nuclear crisis can be a catalyst for regional energy development options, especially for electric power and natural gas, that might otherwise be less feasible.""