

Seoul Offers Electricity Aid to NK Security to be Guaranteed If Pyongyang Scraps Nuclear Weapons

By Park Song-wu
Staff Reporter

South Korea plans to provide electricity to North Korea if Pyongyang agrees to scrap its nuclear weapons programs at the upcoming six-party talks, Unification Minister Chung Dong-young said at a news conference Tuesday.

The earlier project to build two light-water reactors under a 1994 deal will be dismantled if Pyongyang accepts Seoul's "important proposal," said Chung, who also chairs the Standing Committee of the National Security Council.

South Korean officials had previously declined to elaborate on the proposal, which was presented by Chung to North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang last month.

Pyongyang has not yet reacted to the offer. But North Korea experts believe that the proposal persuaded Pyongyang to come back to the multilateral talks on its nuclear ambition.

The electricity could be delivered by 2008 at the earliest because it would take at least three years to construct transmission facilities, he said.

"I think the electricity supply could start when Pyongyang begins the process of nuclear dismantlement," Chung said. "But decisions on the level of dismantlement and how to verify it would be made by the six-party talks."

The targeted amount of electricity which South Korea plans to deliver is around 2 million kilowatts per year, similar to what the two light-water reactors were supposed to produce.

The \$4.6 billion plan for the two reactors by the New York-based Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) has been in crisis over the past two years as the U.S. and Japan wanted to scrap it.

Till now, \$1.54 billion has been poured into the KEDO project with South Korea contributing 70 percent of the cost.

The difficulty of completing the KEDO project, which would take at least 10 more years to finish, led Seoul to think of a ``new approach'' for a breakthrough, Chung said.

``We are planning to provide electricity independently, and that's the key point of this plan,'' he said. ``It will take only three years to begin providing electricity. We are the party that suffers the most in the North's nuclear problem. It is an expression of our strong will to solve the nuclear issue.''

Constructions for power transmission facilities between South Korea's Yangju and the North Korean capital of Pyongyang would immediately begin when the electricity-starved country agrees to give up its nuclear programs, Chung said.

Seoul plans to build the transmission facilities by diverting the budget assigned for the two light-water reactors, for which South Korea will pay 70 percent of the additional \$3.5 billion for the completion of the energy facilities in Sinpo, North Korea.

Chung acknowledged that Seoul would have to bear a great deal of the production cost for the electricity provision. But he asked for the people's understanding as ``it is an investment for a unified Korean Peninsula.''

Chung said Seoul has explained the contents of the proposal to four other countries _ the U.S. China, Russia and Japan _ that are participating in the six-party talks.

North Korea experts believe the proposal changed Kim's mind and made him declare its return to the six party talks, which Pyongyang had boycotted for more than one year, citing Washington's ``hostile'' policies.

Since the U.S. stopped oil shipments to the communist state in 2002 after arguing that it was pursuing a secret nuclear weapons program, North Korea has suffered a severe energy shortage.

North Korea is capable of producing 7.8 million kilowatts per year. But due to lack of fuel, it is currently operating only 30 percent of its power plants. Most of them are outdated.

The oil provision was one of the key components of the 1994 deal between the U.S. and the North, under which the communist state promised to freeze its nuclear facilities.

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