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RUSSIAN URGES SIMULTANEOUS TALKS ON NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR ARMS, LWR PROVISION

Excerpt from report in English by South Korean news agency Yonhap

Seoul, 1 November: Russia on Tuesday [1 November] proposed that the provision of light-water reactors (LWRs) to North Korea and the North's dismantling of nuclear weapons should take place simultaneously.

"Here you see an issue of mutual mistrust. The only solution, therefore, is all the steps synchronize," Russian Ambassador to Seoul Gleb A. Ivaschentsov said in an interview with Yonhap News Agency. "Any preconditions may lead to mistrust and a lack of trust may delay the process."

The Russian envoy was talking about the differing positions between Pyongyang and Washington on the joint statement signed at the end of the fourth round of six-party talks in Beijing in early September.

During the talks on ending the North's nuclear ambitions, the parties produced a joint statement on providing a security guarantee and LWRs and other economic benefits to North Korea in return for the North's abandonment of its nuclear weapons and related programmes.

Washington and Pyongyang, however, are at odds over the parts of the joint statement relating to an "early date" for North Korea's return to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and an "appropriate time" for the parties to begin talks on providing LWRs to the North. [Passage omitted]

Ivashchentsov stressed the need for the participants in the six-way talks to "be a team to produce positive conditions," saying "There should not be a bloc of five parties against one. There should not be a bloc of three parties against three."

Russia and China are said to be siding with North Korea in the nuclear disarmament talks, which also involve South Korea, the United States and Japan.

The Russian envoy urged all the parties concerned to be patient. "A solution cannot be achieved within a week or two."

On the possible provision of food or any other economic aid to North Korea in return for the North's nuclear disarmament, the envoy said, "We are ready to participate in any project, including one to solve the North's energy problems, to help North Korea along with other parties of the six-party talks."

Russian President Vladimir Putin will hold a one-on-one meeting with President Roh Moo-hyun on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum which takes place in the southeastern port city of Busan from 12 to 19 November, according to the envoy.

It will be the 15th summit meeting between leaders of South Korea and Russia since ties were normalized 15 years ago, he said. "It shows the relationship between our countries really approaching the level of trustful and multi-sided partnership."

The envoy hoped Putin's attendance at the Busan APEC summit will "serve as an important step for Russia to bring economic cooperation with Asia-Pacific countries".

"APEC is very important to Russia because two-thirds of Russia lies in Asia. Only Russia and Brunei are self-sufficient in energy among APEC member countries," he said.

He said Russia can offer oil and natural gas as well as electric power to the two Koreas and China from its far-eastern island of Sakhalin. Energy supplies there are currently being developed.

Russia has been engaging in talks with relevant countries for a feasibility study on linking the Trans-Siberian Railway (TSR) and Trans-Korean Railway (TKR), which he described as a "pillar of economic cooperation" between Russia and its Asian neighbours.

Once connected, it will cut 25 days off the journey time of cargo containers to West Europe from Busan, which normally takes 45 days by ship. "It will be much cheaper and much handier," he said.

The envoy said South Korea and Russia need to further enhance bilateral cooperation in science and technology, noting that Russia was ready to transfer high technology to interested Korean firms.

"You see more than one third of the helicopters used in South Korea are Russian made," he said. "It will also be a big step in science and technology cooperation that a first South Korean cosmonaut will be launched into space on a Russian spacecraft by 2007 as scheduled."

Source: Yonhap news agency, Seoul, in English 0004 gmt 1 Nov 05

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