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HEADLINE: Korea, U.S. to Develop Nuclear Fuels Unconvertible to Weapon

BODY:

South Korea and the United States have agreed to develop new nuclear fuels incapable of being used to produce weapons. The Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) said Sunday it completed a bilateral research agreement early this month with its U.S. counterpart, the Department of Energy. "Through the joint study, we aim to make nuclear fuels that cannot be reprocessed or enriched into weapons," MOST official Choi Jong-bae said. The two countries revised the Annex V of the International Nuclear Energy Research Initiative (I-NERI), the attempt of the U.S. to lift proliferation resistance of nuclear fission energy systems. The I-NERI was pushed for on a bilateral basis between the U.S. and other nations. Korea was the first partner to participate in the scheme by inking the joint research pact in May 2001. "The initial Annex V of the Korea-U.S I-NERI stipulated nuclear research collaborations in an overly comprehensive fashion. So we changed so as to stipulate a specific field of developing nuclear fuels unconvertible to weapons," Choi said. Under the revision, the two nations will each appoint two manager-level coordinators and three technical advisers dedicated to the joint research while maintaining the existing bi-annual meeting. "The specific way to enhance proliferation resistance of nuclear fuels will be devised later. But we can imagine fuels combined with other metals making them inherently unable to be reprocessed into arms," Choi projected. Also included in the amended Annex V is to study the next-generation nuclear system, generally known as Generation IV, and hydrogen production from nuclear power. Generation IV refers to the advanced nuclear power-generating technologies, tailored to improving cost, safety waste management and proliferation resistance of nuclear fission energy systems. It is a progressed format from the current heavy and light water nuclear reactors, which some accuse of being adaptable for nuclear weapons development. Nuclear issues have overwhelmed the Korean peninsula down the years for both the South and North. In particular, Pyongyang drew the ire of its neighbors and many other nations last week by announcing it already possesses atomic bombs and will develop more. Through the latter part of last year, Seoul also suffered a series of setbacks after it was found to have produced tiny amounts of plutonium in 1982 and enriched uranium in 2000 without informing the International Atomic Energy Agency. Lacking oil and natural resources, South Korea currently depends on nuclear power for more than 40 percent of the country's total energy supply.

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