

North Korea resumes building nuclear reactors - report

China Daily

Updated: 2005-06-30 15:27

North Korea has restarted the construction of two nuclear reactors suspended under a 1994 landmark deal with the United States, a Japanese newspaper reported on Thursday.

Quoting unidentified U.S. government and other sources in Washington, the Nihon Keizai Shimbun said North Korea had resumed building a 50,000-kilowatt reactor in Yongbyon and a 200,000-kilowatt reactor in Thaechon, north of Pyongyang.

North Korea recently told the United States "indirectly" that it was resuming the construction of the nuclear facilities, the sources were quoted as saying.

Under the 1994 deal, North Korea had suspended the construction of the plutonium-producing, graphite-based reactors in exchange for energy aid and two light-water reactors, which are far more difficult to use in nuclear arms development.

The restart had been confirmed through spy satellite photographs and other data, the sources were quoted as saying.

North Korea's move could be designed to demonstrate to the United States that the country could easily accelerate its nuclear weapons program, the newspaper quoted the sources as saying.

The paper said the construction of the facilities was expected to take several years.

North Korea said in February it possessed nuclear weapons and was boycotting six-party talks on ending its nuclear ambitions.

It recently has shown signs it may return to the talks, which involve South Korea, North Korea, the United States, China, Russia and Japan.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-il told visiting South Korean Unification Minister Chung Dong-young this month that his country was prepared to return to negotiations if certain conditions were met, such as Washington treating Pyongyang as a genuine partner.

The Bush administration last week urged North Korea to quickly set a date for resuming six-party nuclear talks amid an intensifying diplomatic push that is expected to include another trip to Asia by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

On Tuesday, Russia's Interfax news agency quoted a North Korean diplomatic source as saying Pyongyang was preparing to return to the table in the second half of July.