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SOUTH KOREA LINKS NORTH ENERGY AID TO NUCLEAR PROGRAMME, KEDO PROJECT

Excerpt from report in English by South Korean news agency Yonhap

Seoul, 25 August: North Korea will be eligible for South Korea's massive electricity aid only after it abandons its nuclear weapons programme and the moribund international project to construct two light water reactors in the communist state is closed, a top South Korean official said on Thursday [25 August].

Unification Minister Chung Dong-young made it clear that Seoul would not pursue the energy aid and the controversial light water reactor programme at the same time.

"The plan to send electricity to North Korea is based on the premise that Pyongyang abandons its nuclear weapons programme and the light water reactor programme comes to an end," he said at a parliamentary meeting to review the budget for fiscal 2004.

His remarks were apparently intended to ease concern that Seoul might endorse Pyongyang's aspiration to retain the two light water nuclear reactors, whose construction by the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) was suspended.

Washington believes Pyongyang misused the facilities to develop nuclear weapons.

Seoul has already offered to directly supply 2,000 MW of electricity to the North as an alternative to the KEDO project.

South Korea's point man on North Korea reaffirmed Seoul's conditional support for Pyongyang's right to operate nuclear programme for peaceful use.

"It is natural for the North to have the right if it rejoins the Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT] and undergoes inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA]," he said.

At a forum in Seoul earlier in the day, Chung said his country would begin consultations with North Korea for the energy aid as soon as the upcoming six-way talks on Pyongyang's nuclear programme produce a "satisfactory outcome".

"Related countries would provide heavy oil to the energy-starved state during the consultation period," he added.

He stressed that Seoul has no intention of using the electricity aid for political purposes through the control of an on-and-off switch.

"(North Korea) would not need to worry about it, as more than 100,000 South Korean

employees will work at the Kaesong industrial complex by around 2008 and the South's investment there will increase tremendously," he said. [passage omitted]