

## **Roh-Bush Summit Brightens Prospect for Peaceful Solution of Nuke Standoff**

- South Korea, U.S. reiterate strong alliance

President George W. Bush jointly called on North Korea to return to the six-party talks aimed at resolving the lingering standoff over the North's nuclear ambition.

During a crucial summit in Washington, the two leaders reiterated the 'strong alliance' between the two nations, rebuffing doubt over the bilateral ties.

In a joint press conference after the summit at the White House, Roh and Bush set aside differences between the two countries on how to end the regional standoff so they could present a united front and reaffirm their commitment to a diplomatic solution. "Today's meeting should make it clear that South Korea and the United States are of one voice on this very important issue," Bush told reporters after the one-hour summit, with Roh seated at his side.

Roh, for his part, said South Korea and the U.S. are in 'full and perfect agreement' that the North needs to return to the multilateral talks, adding whatever differences between the parties could be worked out through consultations.

Coming in about seven months since the last one in Chile last year, the Roh-Bush summit was expected to provide the last-minute diplomatic efforts to persuade the North back to the six-party talks, which have been in dormancy since June last year.

While the U.S. was said to be losing its patience with the reclusive country, Pyongyang has been boycotting a new round of negotiations demanding Washington first drop its "hostile" policies toward the North and treat it as an equal dialogue partner.

Using the honorific "Mr." once again to call North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, Bush said the six-party talks are "essential" to achieving their shared goal of leaving the Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons.

Bush has recently described the North's leader whom he often called a tyranny as "Mr. Kim Jong-il" and North Korea, in a rare praise, said it "pays attention to" Bush's remarks, including the "Mr." attached to the name of its "Dear Leader." Experts assessed the meaning of the message from the Roh-Bush summit as "positive" for the peaceful resolution of the longstanding nuclear impasse, saying it has heightened expectations for the North's return to the negotiation table.

Roh and Bush, in the meantime, also tried to show a sense of strong unity between the allied powers, which have experienced a tough course of negotiations in the past couple of years on several thorny issues regarding their half-century-long alliance.

"There are, admittedly, many people who worry about potential discord or cacophony," Roh said speaking through a translator. 'But whatever problem arises in the course of our negotiations and talks, we will be able to work them out under close consultations,' Roh said.

Some U.S. media, however, said it was clear that Bush and Roh hadn't ironed out all their differences in the short summit. "There indeed is no difference between our two sides with regard to the basic principles," Roh said, while repeating the phrase "Basic principles" several times.

After somewhat lengthy remarks to reporters, Roh turned to Bush, seated beside him, and posed a question: "How do you feel, Mr. President" Wouldn't you agree that our alliance is strong??? would say the alliance is very strong?, Mr. President," Bush responded without hesitation. "and I want to thank you for your frank assessment of the situation on the peninsula." "The general atmosphere of the summit and the following luncheon meeting was very warm and amiable," according to officials accompanying Roh to the one-night, three-day "Working" visit.

Wary of the possibly growing anti-U.S. sentiment in South Korea, Bush started the press conference by expressing "My country" deepest condolences" on the accidental death of a 51-year-old Korean woman, who was killed on Thursday when she was struck by a U.S. military truck in Tongducheon, just north of Seoul.

Roh also met with National Security Adviser Steven Hadley for about 30 minutes after the lunch with Bush, before returning home in the night of June 11 (KST), according to the officials.

The summit between Roh and Bush heightened the expectations for North Korea to rejoin the six-party talks on its nuclear weapons program, experts said.

In the joint press conference after a one-hour summit at the Oval Office, the two leaders agreed that the U.S. and South Korea "share the same goals" in working to persuade the North to give up nuclear weapons program while reaffirming their commitment to a diplomatic solution.

Bush said he was hopeful that the North could be persuaded to send a delegation back to the six-party talks and to abandon nuclear ambitions.

"The (South Korean) president and I both agree the six-party talks are essential to saying to Mr. Kim Jong-il that he ought to give up his weapons, and making it very clear to him that the way to join the

community of nations is to listen to China and South Korea and Japan and Russia and the United States, and that is to give up nuclear weapons,"he said.

Since the last round of talks with the U.S. along with the four other powers in June last year, North Korea has boycotted the multilateral negotiations citing the U.S. "hostile"policy, represented by the "outpost of tyranny remarks"by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Officials in Seoul have said that the outcome of this week? summit between Roh and Bush would send a message to the North, affecting its decision whether or not to return to the six-way talks.

"The upcoming summit will anyhow affect the attitude of the North,"a senior government official, deeply involved in the nuclear issue, said earlier this week.

"North Korea is going to watch the outcome of the summit closely. And the two leaders will be keeping that in mind."Prof. Koh Yu-hwan of Dongguk University, while appearing on South Korea? all-news cable channel YTN, said Roh and Bush ruled out the possibility of taking other options such as a military preemptive attack against the North when they stressed the peace on the peninsula.

"We could guess that Roh suggested a lot of proposals (during the summit with Bush) from Bush" appreciation for Roh's advice,"Koh said, referring to the "important proposal"which South Korea promised to offer in the new round of six-party talks last month.

Bush said at the press conference that "I appreciate the (South Korean) President's good advice."U.S. and North Korean officials met twice in less than a month through what has become known as the "New York channel"for informal but direct talks between the longtime enemies. But, prospects were divided as the North gave no date for a new round of talks.

In a report on June 9 from Beijing, Japan's Kyodo News Agency quoted diplomatic sources as saying a deadline for the North's return had been set for mid-June when the two sides had contacts last Monday in New York.

Asked if the U.S. was willing to offer any inducements to get North Korea to return to the talks, Bush pointed to the plan offered in the last round of talks last June. "The plan is still there and it? full of inducements,"he said.

North Korea had yet to respond to the U.S. proposal that would offer economic assistance and security guarantees, which the North wants, but only if it agrees to a verifiable dismantling of both the known plutonium program and the alleged uranium program. The nuclear crisis, the second of its kind, emerged in October 2002 when the U.S. accused North Korea of having a uranium-based nuclear arms program in violation of international accords, a claim denied by the North.

North Korea and the U.S. met three times in the six-nation talks since August 2003 along with South Korea, China, Japan and Russia, but no substantial progress has so far been made.

Pyongyang demanded various rewards for its nuclear freeze from the initial stages, such as normalized ties with the U.S. as well as a firm security guarantee and other economic aids. Washington, however, suggested such incentives could be considered only at the end of a comprehensive denuclearization process.

After its Feb. 10 declaration in which it claimed a nuclear-armed status, North Korea demanded the six-party talks be turned into "Mutual disarmament talks" with the U.S., saying it would bolster the nuclear arsenal to protect itself from possible U.S. aggression.