

# North Korean officials plan halt of nuclear programs

By SANG-HUN CHOE  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Saturday it was willing to abandon its nuclear weapons programs, but it demanded a change in American policy as a California congressman critical of the communist state's human rights records visited Pyongyang.

The statement, which echoed the North's earlier stance, appeared to be timed for a visit by Rep. Tom Lantos, the ranking Democrat on the House International Relations Committee.

It also came a day after U.S. officials said one of Washington's harshest critics of North Korea, Undersecretary of State John Bolton, will resign his post.

"Our consistent stance is to denuclearize the Korean peninsula and resolve the problem through dialogue," said a spokesman of North Korea's Foreign Ministry. "If the United States really wants to resolve the nuclear problem through dialogue, it should show through action that it is giving up a hostile policy aimed at toppling our system, and take the road toward coexistence."

The statement was carried by the North's official Korean Central News Agency, which was monitored by South Korea's Yonhap news agency.

As he waited Saturday in Beijing to board a flight for Pyongyang, Lantos said he would discuss human rights issues and the North's nuclear program with officials of the secretive communist regime. He was expected to leave Pyongyang on Tuesday.

Since multinational talks began in 2003 to persuade North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons ambitions, Pyongyang has cited a "hostile" U.S. policy as the key stumbling block. It demanded Washington provide a nonaggression treaty and compensation in return for ending its nuclear programs.

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei, recently identified North Korea as "the No. 1 security threat," saying the isolated communist country, which severed ties with his agency two years ago, probably had enough nuclear

material to make six to eight bombs.

Three rounds of talks on the North's nuclear program involving the United States, North and South Korea, China, Japan and Russia have produced no breakthroughs.

On Saturday, North Korea cited the North Korean Human Rights Act passed by the U.S. Congress in October as a key example of U.S. hostility toward it. The legislation allows Washington to spend up to \$24 million a year in humanitarian aid for North Koreans, including those fleeing their country.

Lantos, a key sponsor of that legislation, arrived in Pyongyang on Saturday.

"I anticipate meeting with North Korean officials, discussing about the nuclear program, hopefully their reintegration into the international community and human rights matters,"

he said in Beijing before flying to Pyongyang.

Separately a bipartisan congressional delegation organized by Rep. Curt Weldon, R-Pa., will visit Pyongyang next week.

Pyongyang said it was holding out on six-party talks to wait for the second Bush administration's North Korea policy to take shape.

On Friday, a senior U.S. official said Bolton will quit as undersecretary of state for arms control and international security and be replaced by Robert G. Joseph, who worked closely with Condoleezza Rice, Bush's choice to take over as secretary of state, on proliferation policy.

Bolton took a vehement stand against North Korea. Pyongyang called him "human scum" and refused to accept him as a dialogue partner.

## ■ ABBAS

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leader Marwan Barghouti, pulled out and the largest opposition group, Hamas, declared a boycott.

Regardless, many saw the vote, which Arafat had repeatedly delayed, as a hopeful sign the Palestinians were building a democratic foundation. Palestinian leaders have already scheduled a parliamentary election for July 17.

## ■ WRECK

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outdoors to see if they could detect a whiff of chlorine, which they could not.

Felkel left his parents for USC to prepare for the upcoming semester and

Many Palestinian refugees outside the West Bank and Gaza complained they could not vote for the person who would represent them in peace talks. The refugee issue has been a key sticking point in past peace talks, with Palestinians demanding they be allowed to return to the homes inside Israel that they fled or were driven from during the 1948 Middle East War. Israel says it will not allow them to return, frightened their numbers would overwhelm the country and damage its Jewish character.

get away from the accident. "It was good to know that when I woke up that morning that I would be away from it that afternoon because I moved up later that day," Felkel said. "I definitely worry about my parents."

With the clean-up continuing and many residents still waiting to return home, Felkel said he is astonished that

"How can they ignore our right to pick our leader?" asked Haitham Abul-Saad, 30, in the Baqaa camp, 17 miles northwest of the Jordanian capital Amman.

But eligible voters cast their ballots with great hope. "The election is our weapon to change our lives," said Souad Radwan, a 46-year-old teacher in Gaza's Jebaliya refugee camp, whose house was demolished during a recent Israeli raid into the camp. "We are sick of the occupation and this troubled life."

an incident like this could occur. "You hear about fires and tornadoes, and people have experienced it before, but when you hear chlorine gas, it isn't something that is ever in your backyard," he said.

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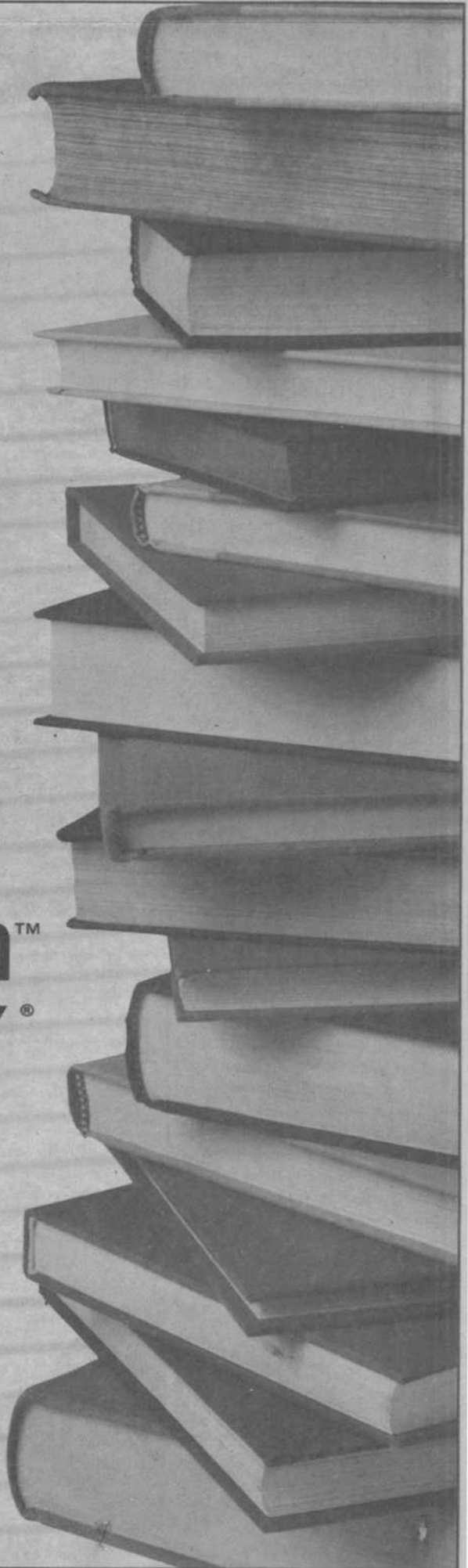
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