

US wants dialogue with Pyongyang: envoy

SEOUL (AFP) — The new US envoy on North Korea said Saturday Washington wants dialogue with Pyongyang, amid concerns about the communist state's possible plans to test-fire a missile and a lack of progress on denuclearisation.

Stephen Bosworth, on his first tour of Asia since being appointed US envoy for North Korea last month, also warned the regime against launching a long-range missile, calling such a plan "ill-advised."

"We're reaching out now. We want dialogue," he said on arrival at Seoul's Incheon airport, when asked when Washington planned to reach out to the North.

North Korea has announced it is readying to fire a rocket for what it calls a satellite launch, but which Washington believes is a test of a long-range missile that could theoretically reach Alaska. Asked whether he would visit the North or meet with North Korean officials even if Pyongyang goes ahead with the launch, Bosworth said that was "a complicated subject."

"We've indicated our position to them on the question of the missile launch, or satellite launch, or whatever they call it. We think it's very ill-advised," he said.

Bosworth also urged Pyongyang to cease all threats against South Korean planes near its airspace, saying he did not think the warning was helpful.

"I think everyone would be a lot happier if they would drop that line of rhetoric," he said.

On Thursday Pyongyang said it could not guarantee security for Seoul's commercial flights near its territory during a 12-day US-South Korean military exercise starting Monday, forcing the rerouting of some 200 flights.

Pyongyang every year denounces the Key Resolve-Foal Eagle exercise as a rehearsal for invasion, while the US-led United Nations Command says the drill is purely defensive.

But inter-Korean tensions are running high this year after the North on January 30 announced it was scrapping all peace accords with the South.

Analysts suspect the North is taking a tougher stance as it competes for US President Barack Obama's attention with other world hot spots.

During a trip to Asia last month on her maiden overseas tour as US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton warned North Korea that its "war of words" with South Korea would not help it forge a new relationship with Washington.

Bosworth, a former US ambassador to South Korea who was appointed by Obama's new administration, will meet South Korea's Foreign Minister Yu Myung-Hwan and Unification Minister Hyun In-Taek on Monday

He will also meet with chief South Korean and Russian delegates to six-party talks on ending North Korea's nuclear programme.

Bosworth said in Tokyo on Friday the nations involved in six-party talks on the North's denuclearisation -- South Korea, the United States, China, Russia and Japan -- wanted Pyongyang to cancel its planned missile launch.

"We hope North Korea refrains from the provocation of firing a missile. And if they don't refrain, if that does happen, then obviously we'll have to take stock and decide how to respond and what we'll do," he said.

"But I'm confident that we can respond in a common fashion."

In Beijing, China's foreign minister said on Saturday all nations should work towards peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.



"We are of the view that safeguarding the peace and stability on the Korean peninsula serves the interest of all parties involved," said Yang Jiechi when asked at a press conference to comment on the North's possible launch.

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