Korean ministers to discuss nuclear issue in Jakarta

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South Korean Foreign Minister Ki Moon-ban said here Thursday that he hoped to meet his North Korean counterpart during the upcoming ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) meeting in Jakarta to discuss the nuclear issue.

"I am willing to meet him (North Korean Foreign Minister) in Jakarta, if he is also willing to meet with me.

"It is not yet decided. But in 2003, when the foreign minister of North Korea attended the ARF meeting, we had a South and North Korean foreign ministers' meeting. Based on this, we hope to have a South Korean-North Korean foreign ministers' meeting," Ki told The Jakarta Post in Seoul on the sidelines of an international conference.

Minister Ki delivered his keynote speech during the two-day conference in which he admitted that the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue remained the most pressing task for his government. The conference's theme was "Democracy in Asia, Europe and the World: Toward a Universal Definition."

The minister's comment came as South and North Korean delegations kicked off separate rounds of military and economic talks on Thursday aimed at easing tensions on the world's last Cold War frontier between North and South Korea.

Ki said the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue was a process that would require a great deal of patience and serious discussion.

"We must convince North Korea that the pursuit of nuclear programs will in no way enhance North Korea's security and that the only way for North Korea to secure economic prosperity is by giving up its nuclear programs," Ki said in his speech.

Southeast Asia, according to Ki, had an important role to play in maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

Though two rounds of six-party talks were held in Beijing in February, no substantial progress has been made on the nuclear issue except that those involved agreed to meet again by the end of this month.

Ki acknowledged that the ARF had served as a forum which allowed the discussion of the region's problems, including the North Korean nuclear issue.

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Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hassan Wirayuda visited Pyongyang and Seoul recently to persuade North Korean Foreign Minister Paeng Nam-sam to attend the ARF meeting in Jakarta.

Indonesia is the current chairman of both the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ARF.

It is widely expected that the South and North Korean foreign ministers will discuss the nuclear question and other security issues on the Korean Peninsula.

Ki also said that there was a need to establish a regional grouping in Northeast Asia like the European Union (EU) in Europe.

We have high hopes that a union of peace and prosperity modeled on the European Union can be realized in Northeast Asia in the not-so-distant future. In Europe, we see the future of East Asia, Ki told the participants at the conference.

The conference, which was opened on Thursday and is being attended by 30 scholars from Asia and Europe as well as 50 local academics, is jointly organized by the Singapore-based Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and the Korean Association of International Studies (KAIS).