
ASIAN FORUM TO EXPRESS 'CONCERN' OVER NORTH KOREA

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More than 20 Asian countries will tell North Korea face to face of their "grave concerns" about its missile tests, a Philippine official said on Thursday, as the United States steps up pressure on the reclusive country.

It was unclear what effect such concern could have when North Korea has ignored international warnings to halt its missile and nuclear programmes, including from the United States and lone major ally China, for years.

North Korea's nuclear ambitions will be high on the agenda of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum (ARF) meeting on Monday hosted by the Philippines, foreign ministry spokesman Robespierre Bolivar told reporters.

"The ARF is the only venue thus far that we have to promote candid and free-flow dialogue and to actually express our concerns to the DPRK side in a face-to-face manner," Bolivar said, referring to the North by the initials for its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The United States issued a statement on Thursday urging Asian countries to "downgrade diplomatic engagements or exchanges" with North Korea ahead of the regional security meeting.

The ARF brings together 27 countries including Australia, China, India, Japan, Russia, North and South Korea and the United States.

"It provides a very candid venue for all the parties to express concerns to the North and to try to find cooperative ways of addressing the issue," Bolivar said.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who is due to attend the Manila meeting, will press China and other Asian countries to take tougher action against North Korea, a senior U.S. official said on Wednesday.

North Korea has made no secret of its plans to develop a nuclear-tipped missile capable of striking the United States.

It says the programmes, which contravene U.N. Security Council resolutions, are necessary to counter U.S. aggression.

North Korea said on Saturday it had conducted another successful test of an intercontinental ballistic missile that proved its ability to strike America's mainland.

Kaynak/Source: