
SOUTH KOREA'S PUSH FOR TOURISM IN NORTH POSES TRICKY BALANCING ACT

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South Korea's push to resume tourism with the North is aimed at resetting border ties, but must overcome Pyongyang's skepticism and chart a careful course around U.S. efforts to pressure leader Kim Jong-un into eliminating his nuclear arsenal.

South Korea's Unification Ministry unveiled plans this week for individual tours in the North's major tourist sites. The effort is meant to appease Pyongyang, which has criticized the South for lackluster progress after their leaders agreed to restart economic cooperation in 2018.

Tourism is not subject to international sanctions imposed over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, and the proposals are designed to avoid breaching U.N. bans on bulk cash transfers and joint business ventures with North Korea.

Seoul says the United States knows of its plans, and South Korean officials are seeking to sound out Pyongyang about them, albeit quietly given the sensitivity of relations, officials said.

After Moon called for reopening North Korea tours in his New Year speech, Seoul diplomats led by nuclear envoy Lee Do-hoon visited Washington. U.S. officials, including Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun, reacted well to the idea, a diplomatic source told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

Biegun practically gave a blank check. But of course it doesn't mean that they want to see a million dollars written down on it right away, the source said, referring to sanctions concerns.

Officials and businessmen are concerned that the North will not welcome the offer.

Read more at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-southkorea-analysis/south-koreas-push-for-tourism-in-north-poses-tricky-balancing-act-idUSKBN1ZN0DH>

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