

N. Korea reopens border with South

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Ahn Young-joon/Associated Press - South Korean soldiers passed cargo trucks lined up to enter North Korea at the customs, immigration and quarantine office in Paju, South Korea, near the border village of Panmunjom, on Tuesday.

North Korea restored regular border crossings for traffic going to South Korean factories in the North on Tuesday, while its leader, Kim Jong-il, reiterated his government's call for a peace treaty with the United States.

North Korea had previously called for talks with Washington to replace the truce — which fell short of a formal peace treaty — that ended the Korean War in 1953.

"We can ease tensions and remove the danger of war on the peninsula when the United States abandons its hostile policy and signs a peace treaty with us," Mr. Kim said in a commentary carried on Pyongyang Radio, which broadcasts North Korean government statements abroad.

The dispatch, which was broadcast late Monday, did not say when Mr. Kim made the statement. But the remark was the latest in a number of recent conciliatory overtures from the North.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday, North Korea restored regular trucking and personnel traffic for South Korean companies that have operations in a joint industrial park in the North Korean border city of Kaesong. The North had sharply curtailed such traffic in December as cross-border tensions grew.

The border will now open 23 times a day to traffic to and from Kaesong, up from 6 times, said Lee Jong-joo, a spokeswoman with the Unification Ministry in Seoul, the South's capital. About 110 South Korean factories employ about 40,000 North Korean workers at Kaesong.

Ian Kelly, a State Department spokesman, said Monday that Washington was "encouraged" by the North's recent gestures toward the South, but he said he had no comment on the North's call for a peace treaty.

Mr. Kelly urged North Korea to return to six-nation talks with regional powers about the dismantling of its nuclear weapons programs. The North, which prefers a bilateral dialogue with the United States, has said the six-party framework is dead.

Also on Tuesday, a diplomatic delegation left Pyongyang, the North's capital, for a visit to Beijing, according to KCNA, the official North Korean news agency. The group was led by Kim Yong-il, a deputy foreign minister, although KCNA gave no further details.

China is North Korea's principal trading partner and its biggest supplier of aid. It also has been the host of the six-party talks that also involve the two Koreas, Japan, Russia and the United States.

Washington has said that negotiating a peace treaty with the North is possible only as part of a broader process that addresses the North's nuclear disarmament. North Korea conducted its second nuclear test in May, and there is a growing suspicion among analysts in Seoul that the North is trying to win diplomatic recognition from Washington while also being accepted as a nuclear power.

The United States led the United Nations forces that fought on South Korea's behalf during the Korean War and afterward signed the truce. North Korea has tried for years to drag various American administrations into peace talks while arguing that it was building nuclear weapons because of Washington's "hostile policies."

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