

North Korea can unleash 13 types of biological agent, South Korea says

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Richard Lloyd Parry in Pyongyang

North Korea's armed forces are capable of carrying out 13 kinds of viral and bacterial attack, the South Korean Government said yesterday in one of the most detailed assessments of the dictatorship's biological weapons arsenal.

In a submission to the South Korean National Assembly, the Defence Minister also said that the North had 5,000 tonnes of chemical weapons, believed to include mustard gas, phosgene and sarin. Among its biological agents are cholera, yellow fever, smallpox, typhus, typhoid fever and dysentery.

Despite the alarming assessment, Kim Tae Young also said that his country's armed forces had the capacity pre-emptively to destroy about a hundred sites connected to the North's nuclear programme in the event of an imminent attack.

"We have a complete list of them," Mr Kim said, adding that the North Korean military may not have achieved the technological breakthroughs necessary to attach nuclear warheads to a missile delivery system or launch them from a bomber.

"It is not clear whether North Korea has nuclear arms," he said. "But we have sufficient information on the locations where items related to the nuclear programme are stored and where the delivery means are placed."

It is known that North Korea's 1.2 million-man armed forces possess significant chemical and biological weapons, but the details announced yesterday emphasise the hardline approach to its neighbour taken by the South Korean Government under the President, Lee Myung Bak.

Yesterday's statements came as North Korea was pressed from other quarters, including China, whose Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, is in Pyongyang on a rare three-day visit.

Mr Wen had talks with the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il, which doubtless included ways of persuading the North to return to the multilateral disarmament talks that it renounced this year.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6862306.ece>