

Deal reached to free S. Korean hostages

by UPI

SEOUL - Negotiators for the South Korean government said they reached an agreement with the Taliban to free 19 South Korean hostages held in Afghanistan for 41 days. "The agreement was reached on conditions that South Korea withdraw its troops stationed in Afghanistan by year's end and impose a ban on its Christian nationals' missionary work in Afghanistan," said a spokesman for the South Korean president at a Seoul news conference Tuesday. The hostages will be released in Kabul and then be flown to Seoul after undergoing medical examinations, the Yonhap News Agency reported. The Korea Times said the Taliban backed off their demand for a release of prisoners in Afghan jails. No timetable was given for the hostages' release but it is expected within days. Taliban fighters kidnapped 23 South Koreans on July 19 as they traveled inside Afghanistan doing volunteer work for a Korean church. Two men were killed and two female hostages were released during the long ordeal. The deal to free the captives came during the third round of direct talks between the Taliban and South Korean government negotiators.

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