

N. Korea says too soon to disarm border

by UPI

SEOUL - South Korea's defense chief said Friday North Korean leader Kim Jong Il believes it is too soon to discuss disarmament of the Demilitarized Zone. South Korean Defense Minister Kim Jang Soo, discussing the results of this week's inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang, said Kim Jong Il rejected an offer from South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun to discuss removing troops and weapons deployed by both countries along the border, South Korea's Yonhap News Agency reported Friday. "The issue was off the table, as Chairman Kim Jong Il said it was still premature to have it discussed," said the defense chief, who attended the summit with Roh. Kim said he raised the issue of South Korean prisoners of war with the North's defense chief, Kim Il Chol, and indicated he will continue the discussion during one-on-one talks scheduled for November. "I focused on the POW issue. I asked the North to consider confirming their fate, exchanging letters, reunions with families (in the South), and eventual repatriation as a humanitarian gesture for reconciliation and cooperation," he said. However, he said his counterpart did not respond to the issue, instead repeating calls for U.S. troops to be removed from the Korean peninsula.

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