

South Korea president vows 'stern' response to any North provocation

Written by Parvez Jabri
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SEOUL: South Korean President Park Geun-Hye on Friday promised a harsh response to any military provocation by North Korea, after its leader Kim Jong-Un ordered the country's nuclear arsenal on standby.

"If North Korea launches a provocation, we must respond with stern punishment to clearly show the price North Korea has to pay and our determination to protect our nation," Park said in a televised speech at a ceremony for newly commissioned military officers.

Following the adoption late Wednesday of unprecedentedly harsh sanctions against Pyongyang by the UN Security Council, Park warned of a "fiercer" North Korean backlash than normal.

Hours after the sanctions resolution was unanimously passed, the North fired six short-range rockets into the sea off its eastern coast -- an almost routine response to condemnation by the international community.

The rocket launches were personally monitored by Kim Jong-Un who, according to state media, also ordered North Korea's nuclear warheads to be deployed "on standby so as to be fired at any moment".

Park said the South would stick to its strategy of squeezing Pyongyang into submission over the issue of denuclearisation.

"We must make North Korea realise that its regime will not survive if it does not give up its nuclear programme," she said, adding that success would be major step towards the eventual unification of the two Koreas.

"Just as it is darkest just before the dawn, I think we are entering the final, the most difficult crucial stage towards the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula," she said.

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