

Exclusive: South Korean nuclear weapons would fracture US ties, defence chief says

SEOUL, Aug 8 (Reuters) - South Korea could rupture its U.S. alliance and shock financial markets if it started building nuclear weapons, Defence Minister Shin Won-sik told Reuters, dismissing renewed domestic calls for the country's own arsenal to deter North Korea.

As the neighbouring North rapidly expands nuclear and missile capabilities, more South Korean officials and members of President Yoon Suk Yeol's conservative ruling party have called in recent months for developing nuclear weapons.

The prospect of another term for former U.S. President Donald Trump, who complained about the cost of the U.S. military presence in South Korea and launched unprecedented talks with the North, has further fuelled the debate.

But Shin, a former three-star army general who also served as a lawmaker in Yoon's party, said having a homegrown nuclear arsenal risked devastating fallout to the South's diplomatic standing and economy, akin to what analysts called Black Monday this week for the stock market's worst losses since 2008.

"You'll face a huge crack in the U.S. alliance, and if we withdraw from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, it would bring various penalties, starting with an immediate shock in our financial market," he said in an interview.

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