

North Korean Leader Visits Amur Power Plant

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Kim being welcomed Sunday near his armored train at the Bureya Station.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Il toured a hydroelectric plant in the Amur region on Sunday as he traveled by train through Russia on his first visit in nine years.

Kim crossed into Russia on his armored train Saturday at the invitation of President Dmitry Medvedev, with the two leaders expected to meet later in the week to discuss the restart of nuclear disarmament talks and the construction of a pipeline that would stream Russian natural gas to North and South Korea.

The train stopped in the border city of Khasan, where Kim was greeted by senior Russian officials, including Viktor Ishayev, presidential envoy to the Far Eastern Federal District.

On Sunday, Kim toured a hydroelectric power plant and its 139-meter dam on the Bureya River. A regional news agency, PortAmur, posted photographs of Kim's visit, during which he signed a guest book and watched a film about the power plant, where construction was completed in 2009.

Kim wore his trademark Mao-style khaki jumpsuit, and in all but one of the photographs he is seen wearing dark sunglasses. He traded them for regular eyeglasses when presented with a framed picture as a gift.

Russia has proposed transmitting surplus electricity produced by the Amur plant to South Korea via North Korea, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported.

Kim traveled to the hydroelectric plant from the Bureya railway station in an armored Mercedes that is being transported on his train, Interfax said. RIA-Novosti said Kim's train consists of 17 rail cars, plus four Russian cars that were added on in Khasan to transport Ishayev, who is traveling with Kim, and also Russian security guards and service personnel.

Kim's visit to Russia comes amid signs that North Korea is increasing efforts to secure aid and restart stalled six-nation disarmament negotiations aimed at ending its nuclear weapons program in return for aid and other concessions.

Russia announced Friday that it was providing food assistance, including some 50,000 tons of wheat, to the country.

The 69-year-old Kim traveled to China in May in a trip seen by many as an attempt to secure aid, investment and support for a transfer of power to his youngest son, Kim Jong Un.

Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said Kim is now also seeking Russia's support for the father-to-son power transfer.

But the younger Kim's name was not in the KCNA dispatch that listed top officials who were accompanying Kim on his Russia trip.

Russia 24 state television reported that Medvedev would meet Kim in Ulan-Ude, capital of Buryatia, which is located about 3,000 kilometers from Khasan.

Yonhap said Kim's train left Amur for Ulan-Ude later Sunday and his summit with Medvedev will take place Tuesday at an army base.

Kim last visited Russia in 2002, a four-day trip limited to the Far East. A year earlier, however, he made a 24-day train trek across the country to Moscow and back.

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