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Russia Invites North Korea's Kim Jong-un to Visit on Victory Day, Report Says

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North Korean leader Kim Jong-un holds a boy after a photo session with participants in the Second Meeting of KPA Exemplary Servicemen's Families in December.

Russia has invited North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to attend a May ceremony marking the end of World War II, in what would be Kim's first foreign visit since taking the helm of the reclusive state in 2011, Japan's Asahi Shimbun daily said Wednesday.

Kim would probably meet Russian President Vladimir Putin, as North Korea backs Russia in the Ukraine crisis and Moscow needs Pyongyang's cooperation in boosting natural gas exports to South Korea, the newspaper said, quoting unnamed diplomatic sources.

But it was unclear at the moment whether Kim will accept the invitation, the Asahi said.

North Korea is seeking closer ties with Russia as it faces international criticism over accusations of human rights abuses and its nuclear program.

Putin held talks with Kim's personal envoy last month and called for deeper ties with North

Korea to improve regional security.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said North Korea was ready to resume stalled international talks on its nuclear program.

North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the United States began talks in 2003 to rid the Korean Peninsula of nuclear weapons, but they were suspended after Pyongyang tested nuclear devices in 2006 and 2009.

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