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Putin Spokesman Confirms Kim Jong-un Invited to Visit Moscow

By The Moscow Times

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North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has invited North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to Moscow next year to mark the 70th anniversary of the Soviet defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II, the Kremlin's spokesman said Friday.

It would be Kim's first foreign visit since taking the helm of the reclusive east Asian state in 2011. His personal envoy came to Moscow last month in the framework of efforts by the two Cold War-era allies to improve relations.

"Yes, such an invitation was sent," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the state news agency TASS. Russia marks the former Soviet Union's World War II victory every year on May 9.

Moscow needs North Korean cooperation in boosting natural gas exports to South Korea as

Gazprom wants to build a gas pipeline through North Korea to reach its southern neighbor.

Pyongyang is also seeking support from Russia, a permanent veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council, against international criticism over accusations of human rights abuses and its nuclear program.

The UN General Assembly committee dealing with human rights passed a resolution last month calling for the Security Council to consider referring North Korea to the International Criminal Court for alleged crimes against humanity.

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

North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the U.S. 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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