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North Korea Sends Positive Signal on Kim Jong Un Visit, Russia Says

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North Korean leader Kim Jong Un

Russia received a positive initial signal from North Korea after President Vladimir Putin invited its leader Kim Jong Un to attend anniversary celebrations of the Soviet victory over Germany in World War II, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

The trip would be Kim's first foreign visit since taking the helm of the reclusive east Asian state in 2011.

Moscow and Pyongyang are looking to boost ties and North Korea is seeking support from Russia against international criticism over accusations of human rights abuses.

Asked at a news conference on Wednesday about Pyongyang's response to the Russian invitation, Lavrov replied: "The first signal was positive." He did not elaborate.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said last month that Kim had been invited to the World War II victory anniversary which Russia marks every year on May 9.

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.

Russia, as a permanent veto-wielding member of the Security Council, has the power to strike down any such move.

Moscow also needs Pyongyang 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.

Lavrov has previously 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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