

North Korea Declares 2015 Year of Friendship With Russia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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North Korean leader Kim Jong Un smiles as he plants trees with fighter pilots from Unit 447 of the Korean People's Army in Pyongyang.

North Korea has declared 2015 a "year of friendship" with Russia amid efforts to boost ties and cultural exchange as the countries mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, North Korea's official news agency was quoted as saying Wednesday.

The endeavor will focus on developing diplomatic, business and cultural contacts and include joint cultural events in Moscow, Pyongyang and other cities, South Korean English-language newspaper The Korea Herald cited the North's Korean Central News Agency as saying in a dispatch.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is already set to visit Moscow in May for Victory Day celebrations.

The shoring-up of Moscow-Pyongyang ties is occurring against the backdrop of a waning in relations between North Korea and its longtime ally China, the newspaper reported.

Russia has also pivoted eastward amid a series of bids to boost diplomatic and business ties over the past year as the country's relations with the West have floundered over Moscow's perceived role in the Ukraine crisis.

The end of World War II is a great source of national pride for Russians because it marks the complete expulsion of Nazi occupiers. The event is revered with similar enthusiasm by Koreans as a liberation from decades of Japanese colonial rule.

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