

North Korea's Titular Head of State to Visit Moscow Instead of Kim Jong Un

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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North Korea announced Monday that the head of its parliament will attend this month's Victory Day celebration in Moscow, squelching speculation that supreme leader Kim Jong Un would use the event to make his international debut.

Moscow said in March that Kim was among dozens of world leaders invited to the May 9 celebrations, which mark the 70th anniversary of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in World War II. North Korea had never confirmed Kim would go.

After Moscow announced last week that Kim had declined the invitation, North Korea said through its state-run media on Monday that Kim Yong Nam, the head of the presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, would attend.

Kim Yong Nam is a senior statesman who often represents the country at international or diplomatic events.

The brief North Korean announcement made no mention of an invitation to leader Kim.

But Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told The Associated Press that "internal matters" were preventing him from leaving North Korea.

The idea that leader Kim, who assumed power after the death of his father in 2011, might choose Moscow for his first trip abroad seemed plausible because North Korea — increasingly wary of China's economic and political influence — has been actively pursuing better relations with Russia.

The two countries have increased official exchanges and stepped up talks to bolster trade.

The Russian president, unhappy with pressure from the West over Ukraine, has also shown more interest in developing ties as part of what some analysts have dubbed "Putin's pivot" to Asia.

But foreign observers have suggested North Korea did not see the Moscow event as right for Kim's debut because he would be sharing the stage with other leaders.

Some analysts have also suggested North Korea may believe China remains the most appropriate place for Kim to travel to first.

Had he gone, Kim might have seen some very familiar sights. The highlight of Victory Day will be a military parade on Red Square overseen by Putin. North Korea also has a penchant for similar shows on Kim Il Sung Square in the center of Pyongyang.

Kim would also not have had to deal with the awkwardness of being on the same stage with President Barack Obama, who is among many Western leaders who have snubbed the invitation.

Others have decided to visit Moscow to pay their respects to Russia for its role in World War II, but will not attend the military parade.

North Korea is expected to hold its own elaborate anniversary celebrations in October.

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