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Putin Hands World War II Medal to North Korea's Kim Jong Un

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Kim Jong Un made his first public appearance in three weeks Saturday following an absence that sparked intense speculation about his health and the future of his sanctioned regime. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has given North Korean leader Kim Jong Un a commemorative World War II medal for his role in preserving the memory of Soviet soldiers killed in North Korea, Russia's Embassy in Pyongyang said Tuesday.

The ceremony took place at the Mansudae Assembly Hall, where Kim reshuffled North Korea's highest decision-making body last month. The North Korean leader made his first public appearance in three weeks Saturday following an absence that sparked intense speculation about his health and the future of his sanctioned regime.

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Russia's ambassador handed the commemorative medal dubbed "75 Years of Victory in the

Great Patriotic War 1941-1945" to Kim's foreign minister, according to a statement and photographs published on the embassy's Facebook page. There was no sighting of Kim Jong Un himself.

Kim was awarded "for his great personal contribution to the commemoration of dead and buried Soviet citizens on the territory of the DPRK and showing concern about the safety of the Soviet soldiers' graves and memorial sites." Russia's state-run TASS news agency reports that 1,375 Soviet soldiers are buried in North Korea.

Russian Ambassador Alexander Matsegora and North Korean foreign minister Ri Son Gwon held a brief sit-down following the ceremony.

"They confirmed their intention to continue active efforts to consistently implement the agreements... aimed at further developing and strengthening multifaceted Russian-Korean cooperation," the embassy said.

Kim visited Russia for the first time in April 2019, where he met with Putin to discuss his nuclear stalemate with the United States.

Russia commemorates the Soviet Union's victory over the Nazis each year on May 9 with a massive military parade through Moscow's Red Square. While Putin postponed this year's parade due to the coronavirus, military jets are still scheduled to fly in formation over the capital to mark the 75th anniversary of Victory Day.

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