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Putin, Kim Vow Stronger Russia-North Korea Ties — State Agency

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North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un (L) and Russia's President Vladimir Putin in Vladivostok, Russia on April 25, 2019. **Valery Sharifulin/TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un exchanged letters indicating stronger bilateral relations amid Moscow's international isolation over its war in Ukraine, North Korean state media reported Monday.

The letters follow Pyongyang's recognition of two Moscow-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine and the country's reported readiness to send workers to the breakaway regions to aid in their reconstruction.

Putin told Kim that Moscow and Pyongyang would "continue to expand the comprehensive and constructive bilateral relations with common efforts," according to the state news agency KCNA.

Kim noted in his letter to Putin that Russian-North Korean strategic and tactical cooperation has "put on a new high stage in the common front for frustrating the hostile forces' military threat and provocation."

Pyongyang typically uses the term "hostile forces" to refer to the United States and its allies.

Putin's message on the anniversary of the end of Japan's 1910-1945 colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula — marked as Liberation Day by North Korea — contained similar language to the one he sent Kim last year.

In the 2021 letter, Putin expressed confidence that the sides would further promote mutually beneficial cooperation following Kim's first Russia visit in 2019.

The Kremlin has not yet commented on Putin's reported letter to Kim.

North Korea last month became the third state after Russia and Syria to officially recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, collectively referred to as the Donbas.

Donetsk People's Republic leader Denis Pushilin hailed North Korea's recognition as a "triumph of diplomacy" for the breakaway region and expressed hope for "active and fruitful cooperation" with its newly acquired Asian partner.

Russia's Ambassador to Pyongyang Alexander Matsegora has said North Korean workers would be an "asset" in "the serious task" of restoring the destroyed social, infrastructural and industrial facilities in the Donbas during Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

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