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Moscow May Have Helped North Korea Develop Its New Warship, Seoul Claims

By AFP

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An unveiling ceremony for North Korea's newest destroyer in late April. **Korean Central News Agency**

Work on North Korea's newly unveiled warship may have involved assistance from Russia, South Korea's military said on Thursday.

On Saturday, Pyongyang unveiled a 5,000-ton destroyer-class vessel named Choe Hyon that some analysts said could be equipped with short-range tactical nuclear missiles.

Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesperson Lee Sung-jun told reporters in South Korea that Russia may have offered help with constructing the warship.

"Looking at the weapons and equipment that were revealed, we believe that there is a possibility that they received technology, funds or assistance from Russia," Lee told reporters on Thursday. "We are conducting a more detailed analysis."

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the first day of a two-day weapons test of the

vessel this week, according to Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency, during which he ordered officials to work on "accelerating the nuclear armament of the navy."

Pyongyang has said the destroyer, which it claimed is equipped with the "most powerful weapons," would "enter into operation early next year."

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During the test, Kim said the North's ship-based firepower system was "effectively combined" with the "most powerful strike means, including supersonic cruise missiles, strategic cruise missiles and tactical ballistic missiles."

South Korean JCS spokesman Lee said the ship's deployment is likely to require more time.

"In the case of warships, it takes several years to build and even after completion, it takes additional time for them to become operational," he said.

"So, although the Choe Hyon has been unveiled, it seems likely that considerably more time will be needed for its [operational] deployment," Lee added.

Earlier this week, North Korea confirmed for the first time that it had deployed troops to Russia, with state news agency KCNA reporting that Pyongyang's soldiers participated in combat operations to retake territory in the Kursk region.

That confirmation followed months of reports from South Korean and Western intelligence agencies that Pyongyang had sent more than 10,000 soldiers to assist Russia in Kursk last year.

On Wednesday, Russia and North Korea announced the construction of their first automobile bridge, touting the project as a symbol of deepening ties between the two countries.

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