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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to Visit North Korea This Weekend

By AFP

July 09, 2025

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un shakes hands with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. **Russian Foreign Ministry / TASS**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will visit North Korea this weekend, the latest in a series of high-profile visits by top Russian officials as the two countries deepen relations.

Lavrov "will visit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on July 11-13" for the "second round of strategic dialogue at the level of foreign ministers," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters on Wednesday.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency reported earlier that Lavrov would visit "at the invitation of the DPRK Foreign Ministry."

Pyongyang has become one of Moscow's key allies since the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, sending thousands of troops and container loads of weapons to help Russian forces oust

Ukrainian forces from the southwestern Kursk region.

Around 600 North Korean soldiers have been killed and thousands more wounded fighting for Russia, according to authorities in Seoul.

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North Korea confirmed it had deployed troops to support Russia's war in April, admitting that some of its soldiers had been killed in combat.

Leader Kim Jong Un has subsequently been shown in state media images beside the flag-draped coffins of North Korean soldiers killed while helping Russia fight Ukraine.

Russia's security chief Sergei Shoigu has visited Pyongyang multiple times this year, including last month, when the two countries marked the one-year anniversary of the signing of a mutual defense agreement.

Shoigu announced that the nuclear-armed North would send builders and deminers to the Kursk region in the coming weeks.

The frequency of visits by senior Russian officials to North Korea "is highly unusual," Lim Eul-chul, a professor at Kyungnam University, told AFP.

"At the center of these discussions may well be plans for Kim's anticipated visit to Russia," he added.

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