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Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un Vow to Strengthen Ties Ahead of Alaska Summit

By AFP

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Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un. **kremlin.ru**

Russia's Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un have vowed to strengthen cooperation, days ahead of Putin's summit in Alaska with U.S President Donald Trump, Pyongyang's state media reported on Wednesday.

Putin and Kim spoke by phone in a "warm, comradely atmosphere" on Tuesday and confirmed "their will to strengthen cooperation in the future," the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

Putin expressed appreciation for "the self-sacrificing spirit displayed by service personnel of the Korean People's Army in liberating Kursk," KCNA added, referring to North Korea's role in repelling Ukrainian forces in the border region.

Kim, in turn, pledged that North Korea would "fully support all measures to be taken by the

Russian leadership in the future."

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The Kremlin confirmed the phone call in a statement, adding that Putin had "shared information with Kim Jong Un in the context of the upcoming talks with U.S. President Donald Trump."

Trump is expected to press Russia to end its war against Ukraine during their meeting in Alaska on Friday.

The public disclosure of Kim's and Putin's conversation signals the "intent to showcase their closeness to domestic and international audiences," Yang Moo-jin, president of the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, told AFP.

Should Trump and Putin agree on a Ukraine peace deal, "Putin could convey Kim's stance on Trump's North Korea-related interests, potentially including a conditional summit on nuclear disarmament," Yang said.

"If Russia-Ukraine peace talks gather momentum, they could have a positive spillover effect on U.S.-North Korea and inter-Korean dialogue," he added.

Russia and North Korea have forged closer ties in recent years, with Pyongyang sending troops and weapons to Russia as it wages its war against neighboring Ukraine.

The two countries signed a mutual defence pact last year, when Putin visited the reclusive state.

North Korea confirmed for the first time in April that it had deployed a contingent of its soldiers in the Kursk border region alongside Russian troops.

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