
NORTH KOREA PLANE DRIVES SPECULATION OVER KIM JONG UN VISIT TO CHINA

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An airplane normally used by North Korean VIPs flew out of China on Tuesday (May 8), Japanese media reported, sparking speculation that Kim Jong Un may have made a secret visit to the country.

NHK television showed images of two planes taking off from the northeastern port city of Dalian - one belonging to North Korea's Air Koryo, and another used by high-profile officials from Pyongyang.

The Chinese foreign ministry would not confirm or deny that a North Korean official had visited the country.

"I have no information to offer at this moment," foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a regular press briefing.

"China and the DPRK are close neighbours and we maintain normal communication and exchanges with each other," Geng said, using North Korea's official acronym.

If confirmed, the visit would be the latest diplomatic venture for Kim, who met South Korean President Moon Jae-in last month and could hold a historic summit with US President Donald Trump in June.

Kim travelled to Beijing by train in March for his maiden official trip abroad and met President Xi Jinping for the first time since taking power in 2011.

His trip was kept secret until he returned to North Korea.

One of the planes seen in Dalian resembled the one used by Kim's sister and close aide, Kim Yo Jong, to travel to South Korea for the Winter Olympics in February.

NHK television showed images of a motorcade of cars with black-tinted windows travelling through Dalian, where roads and air traffic had been temporarily restricted a day before.

China has sought to improve relations with its Cold War-era ally after ties chilled over Beijing's support of United Nations sanctions over Pyongyang's nuclear activities.

Beijing is keen to avoid being left out in the cold as North Korea holds talks with South Korea and

the United States.

China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, met Kim in Pyongyang last week - the first trip there by a Chinese foreign minister since 2007.

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