

Kim enjoys Russian luxury limousine gifted by Putin as two nations expand ties

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Online Desk: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un used a Russian luxury limousine gifted by President Vladimir Putin recently, Kim's sister said Saturday, praising the car's "special function" and the two countries' deepening bilateral ties.

In February, Putin sent Kim a high-end Aurus Senat limousine, which he had shown to the North Korean leader when they met for a summit in Russia in September. Observers said the shipment violated a United Nations resolution aimed at pressuring the North to give up its nuclear weapons program by banning the supply of luxury items to North Korea.

In a statement carried Saturday by state media, Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, said that her brother used that limousine for the first time during an open event the previous day.

"The special function of the private car is perfect and can be thoroughly trusted," Kim Yo Jong said. "Kim Jong Un's using of the private car sent by the president of the Russian Federation as a gift is a clear proof of (North Korea)-Russia friendship, which is developing in a comprehensive way on a new high stage."

According to Russian state media, Aurus was the first Russian luxury car brand, and it's been used in motorcades of top officials since Putin first used an Aurus limousine during his inauguration ceremony in 2018.

Kim, 40, possess a collection of foreign-made luxury cars believed to have been smuggled into his country. During his Russia visit, he traveled between meeting sites in a Maybach limousine that was brought with him on one of his special train carriages. Other limousines he's reportedly used include a Mercedes-Maybach S600 Pullman Guard and a Maybach S62.

Over the past year, North Korea and Russia have sharply boosted their military and other cooperation as they face separate confrontations with the West — North Korea for its advancing nuclear program and Russia for its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Drawing the biggest outside concerns was North Korea's purported shipments of conventional weapons to support Russia's war with Ukraine to receive high-tech Russian weapons technologies and other support.

Russia, together with China, have repeatedly blocked the U.S. and its partners' attempts to impose fresh U.N. sanctions on North Korea over its barrage of banned ballistic missile tests.