

Kim Jong-Un grants rare North Korean citizenship to American Park Sang-Kwon

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Sept. 8, 2012: Park Sang-Kwon, right, CEO of Pyeonghwa Motors, is pictured in North Korea with Hyung Jin Moon, the successor to Sun Myung Moon, the deceased founder of the Unification Church. (AFP)

The U.S. head of a joint venture by North Korea and the Unification Church of South Korea has reportedly been granted rare honorary citizenship by Pyongyang in an effort to encourage new investment.

Agence France Presse reports that Park Sang-Kwon, CEO of Pyeonghwa Motors, told South Korea's Yonhap news agency that he received the citizenship in Pyongyang last month.

"This means that North Korea has acknowledged the trust they had put in me," Park said. "They were also encouraging me to start new projects in the North, more freely and aggressively."

Park is just the second person to be awarded honorary citizenship and the first since Kim Jong-Un took over as North Korea's leader in December 2011, according to Yonhap. The other is Kim Chin-Kyung, an American citizen who is president of Pyongyang University of Science and Technology.

"This is to certify that comrade Park Sang-Kwon, who has made outstanding contributions to the nation's

prosperity, is an honorary citizen of Pyongyang,” read an identification card held by Park.

He was only the second person to be awarded honorary citizenship and the first since Kim Jong-Un took over as the North's leader in December 2011, Yonhap said.

The other is Kim Chin-Kyung, a US citizen who is president of Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, which opened in 2010 as an inter-Korean cooperation project.

Kim received his honorary citizenship in August 2011 from then-leader Kim Jong-Il, Yonhap said.

Park also confirmed reports that the Unification Church planned to sell its entire stake in the automotive company, as well as a hotel in Pyongyang, to North Korea.

In return, he asked Pyongyang to allow him to start a new business, probably in distribution.

Pyeonghwa Motors, which started production in 2002, has been in the black for the past five years, Park said.

"North Koreans would also be pleased to take it over as it's profitable," he added. Pyeonghwa produces cars and SUVs.

The isolated North has been seeking to attract foreign investment but investors from the West are deterred by its reputation as a rogue nuclear state and its communist leadership.

Direct investment largely comes from its main ally, China.