

North Korea sends wreath to Moon's family: State media

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SEOUL - North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un has sent a wreath to the family of Sun Myung Moon, the deceased founder of the Unification Church, state media said Friday.

Kim sent the wreath, expressing "deep condolences" over Moon's death, the North's official Korean Central News Agency said.

Hyung Jin Moon, Moon's youngest son and successor as church leader, received the wreath through Jang Song-Thaek and senior party official Kim Yang-Gon, it said.

Jang, whose wife is the sister of the North's late leader Kim Jong-Il, is seen as a key figure in the North's power elite and supports the young ruler, who is in his late 20s.

Moon also received the North's "National Reunification Prize" conferred by the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly (parliament), the agency said.

The prize was also conveyed to Moon Hyung Jin, who crossed the border early Friday to receive North Korean mourners, it said.

"Moon positively contributed to realising the nation's reconciliation and unity and the country's peaceful reunification and achieving the prosperity common to the nation," the agency said.

"It's not clear whether Kim met Hyung Jin Moon, who is expected to carry the wreath when he comes back tomorrow," church spokesman Ahn Ho-Yeol told AFP.

Sun Myung Moon, the self-styled messiah who founded the church famed for its mass weddings and business empire, spanning cars to sushi, died Monday at the age of 92 due to complications from pneumonia.

Although a staunch anti-communist, Moon began building a relationship with North Korea in the 1990s, visiting Pyongyang in 1991 to meet with then leader Kim Il-Sung for talks that touched on reunification of the divided peninsula.

The unscheduled trip sparked speculation that North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Un may meet Hyung Jin Moon to convey his condolences in person.

Kim on Wednesday issued a public message of condolence over Moon's death but stopped short of sending mourners to the South.

This was despite the fact that Moon had sent Unification Church delegations - including some of his family members - to the funerals of both Kim Il-Sung in 1994 and Kim Jong-Il last year.

Hyung Jin Moon was accompanied by Park Sang-Kwon, president of an automaking joint venture the church established in North Korea in 1999.

Park said Thursday that the North's decision to not send mourners was because of lingering anger over a joint US-South Korea military exercise last month and the fact that it was struggling with the fallout from a typhoon.

A strong typhoon hit North Korea last month, killing 48 people and leaving more than 50 injured or missing, according to the North Korean government.

Official delegations from the two Koreas, who technically remain in a state of war, rarely cross the heavily militarised border.