

North Korea

## Kim Jong-un Reappears - at Fertilizer Plant

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After a wave of news reports that North Korea's leader was gravely sick or even dead, Kim Jong-un has reappeared in public, for the first time in 21 days, at a fertilizer plant. North Korean state radio said Kim on Friday attended the completion ceremony for a phosphate fertilizer plant in Sunchon, a city about 50 km north of the capital, Pyongyang. Rumors about Kim's health began to swirl after he skipped a major North Korean political anniversary April 15. He had last been seen in public April 11. The reason for his absence was unclear. State media have not addressed the rumors about his health. "I'd rather not comment on it yet," U.S. President Donald Trump said Friday. "We'll have something to say about it at the appropriate time."



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un (center) attends a ceremony to mark the completion of a fertilizer factory in Sunchon, north of Pyongyang on Friday, in this photo released by the official [North] Korean Central News Agency the following day.

### ◆ Previous Disappearance

It was not the first time Kim had reappeared following rumors about his health. In 2014, Kim disappeared from public view for about 40 days, prompting a flurry of speculation. He eventually reemerged using a cane.

This time around, however, the rumors were especially intense. Among the theories: Kim had undergone failed heart surgery, suffered a kidney malfunction, was in poor health because of coronavirus fears or had been injured in a botched missile test. TMZ, the celebrity gossip website, reported Kim had died.

On social media, the portly North Korean leader's "death" had become an internet joke, with the hashtag #KimJongUnDead trending on Twitter, Instagram and other platforms.

"The incident may reveal more about us than about Kim: how we keep trying to wish the problem of North Korea away through fevered speculation, rather than finding ways to deal with it as it is," John Delury, a professor at Yonsei University, said.