

As North Korea Ponders Economic Reform, Its Top Diplomat To Visit Vietnam

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North Korea's foreign minister, Ri Yong Ho, will visit Vietnam this month to learn about its model of economic reform, a diplomatic source and media reported on Wednesday.

Ri will visit the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi, for three days from Nov. 27 to inspect industrial zones and interview economic experts, a diplomatic source with direct knowledge of the trip told Reuters.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency, citing unidentified sources, also reported that Ri would make the three-day trip at that time.

Vietnam's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. South Korea's foreign ministry said it was not aware of Ri's visit.

After years of self-imposed isolation, and sanctions for its development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, North Korea has this year been trying to build its foreign contacts.

Its leader, Kim Jong Un, has spoken of his hopes for reform of North Korea's economy and has looked to examples in the region.

Kim met South Korean President Moon Jae-in three times this year. In their talks, Kim repeatedly cited Vietnam's successes, South Korean media reported.

Kim also help a summit with U.S. President Donald Trump in Singapore in June, when he was cited by North Korean media as expressing his admiration for Singapore's economic development.

U.S. officials have said Vietnam's socialist market economy could be an example for North Korea.

Yonhap said Ri had told the Vietnamese government that North Korea hoped to learn from Vietnam's model of development.

This week Kim hosted President Miguel Diaz-Canel of Cuba - another country under U.S. sanctions - during a lavish visit in Pyongyang, where the two leaders vowed to boost their cooperation.

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