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N. Korean leader sends condolences over Moon

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SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un sent condolences on Wednesday over the death of Unification Church founder Sun Myung Moon, fuelling speculation he might send a delegation to the funeral in South Korea next week.

Moon, a self-styled messiah who gathered a global following behind his church and spawned a multi-billion business empire, died on Monday at the age of 92.

His funeral will be held September 15 at the church's headquarters in Gapyeong, about 60 miles east of Seoul.

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

A church-affiliated firm, Pyeonghwa (Peace) Motors, established a joint carmaking business in North Korea in 1999.

Kim Jong-Un's message was carried in a short report on the state's official Korean Central News Agency.

"I express my deep condolences to widow Han Hak Ja and the bereaved family upon receiving the sad news that Moon Sun Myung... died of illness," the message read.

"Though he passed away, his efforts and feats made for the reconciliation and unity of the nation, the reunification of the country and the world peace will last forever."

Since Moon's death, there has been increasing speculation that North Korea would seek to send an official delegation to pay its respects at his funeral.

Moon sent Unification Church delegations -- including some of his family members -- to the funerals of both Kim Il-Sung in 1994 and Kim Jong-Un's father Kim Jong-Il last year.

As of Tuesday evening, South Korea's Unification Ministry said it had received no formal request from Pyongyang to attend Moon's funeral.