

# US hits senior North Korean officials with sanctions, \$3 million bounties

By Jonathan Greig

Published: 2025-07-24 · Archived: 2026-04-05 17:55:41 UTC

Three senior North Korean officials involved in IT schemes have been sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department.

Kim Se Un, Jo Kyong Hun and Myong Chol Min are accused of helping North Korea evade U.S. and United Nations sanctions through an IT worker plot that involved tricking companies into hiring North Koreans using stolen identities.

U.S. law enforcement action centered on Korea Sobaeksu Trading Company — a North Korean company allegedly used as a front for the country's Munitions Industry Department, which oversees the DPRK's nuclear program and is involved in the development of ballistic missiles.

North Korean officials ran the IT worker scheme through the company and used it to operate in Vietnam as well as other countries. U.S. officials added that Sobaeksu "has been involved in nuclear procurement activities on behalf of the Munitions Industry Department."

Kim Se Un is a representative of the company and helps run subordinate companies in Vietnam. The State Department [said](#) it authorized a reward offer up to \$3 million for information leading to Kim Se's arrest or conviction.

Jo Kyong Hun, an associate of Kim Se, was also sanctioned and is accused of being a team leader among the IT workers, helping generate revenue for Pyongyang through cryptocurrency and other projects.

The Treasury Department included another Kim Se subordinate, Myong Chol Min, in the sanctions, writing that in addition to facilitating the IT worker scheme, he tried to import tobacco and other products into North Korea. A \$3 million bounty for his whereabouts was announced as well.

"The DPRK relies on front companies like Korea Sobaeksu Trading Company and key facilitators to procure materials and generate revenue for the regime's illegal nuclear and ballistic missile programs," said Bradley Smith, director of the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control.

An American woman was sentenced to more than eight years in prison on Thursday for her role in running laptop farms on behalf of the North Korean operation. North Korea has been able to earn millions from getting workers hired in high-paying roles at U.S. companies.

The regime withholds most of the wages earned by the IT workers and in some cases, workers have used malware to steal information from the companies that hired them.

The scheme is used specifically to fund North Korea’s ballistic missile programs, according to the State Department.

Officials said the ballistic missiles produced through the effort have in some cases been transferred to Russia where they are used to target Ukraine.

The State Department issued a \$7 million bounty for information on Sim Hyon-Sop and \$500,000 for Kim Yong-Bok, Kim Chol-Min, Ri Tong-Min and Ri Won-Ho.

The FBI also [released](#) a guide for HR teams to use as assistance for detecting North Korean IT workers during the interview process.

Alongside the actions announced by the Treasury Department, the Justice Department unsealed indictments against seven North Korean nationals accused of trafficking counterfeit cigarettes.

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Source: <https://therecord.media/us-sanctions-north-korean-officers-it-worker-scheme>