

## Kim Jong Un appears to import luxury Maybach, Lexus SUVs despite sanctions

Analysis of state media shows vehicle priced at upwards of \$175K in North Korean leader's entourage during recent event

Colin Zwirko November 28, 2023



Kim Jong Un waving to a crowd from inside his Maybach limousine after an April 2022 military parade | Image: KCTV (April 30, 2022)

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un appeared to be using new luxury Maybach and Lexus SUVs during a visit to the east coast over the weekend, according to *NK News* analysis of state media, pointing to a likely violation of international sanctions on the import of such vehicles.

Kim arrived at the [Ryongsong Machine Complex](#) in Hamhung with a motorcade that included what looks like a Mercedes-Benz Maybach GLS 600 and Lexus LX SUV built in the last few years, though *Korean Central Television* (KCTV) footage of the visit attempted to avoid showing the vehicles directly.

*NK News* has identified the vehicles in the background and in window reflections in some shots.

Details of one vehicle match the Maybach GLS 600 model that was released in 2019, with shared features including the wheel design, side window shape and a likely Maybach badge on the rear quarter panel.

Another SUV featured a front grill matching the fourth-generation Lexus LX SUV released in 2022.





*This comparison shows matching cosmetic aspects of the newest generation Lexus LX SUV and a vehicle seen in KCTV footage of Kim at the Ryongsong factory / Images: KCTV (Nov. 27, 2023); Mercedes; edited by NK News*

The Maybach retails at around US\$175,000 for the base model and the Lexus at over \$85,000.

However, the Maybach likely received custom armor for the protection of the leader as with his other vehicles, while the Lexus could be for other top officials.

Their apparent import comes as state media continues to urge citizens to endure economic hardships in the underdeveloped state.

It is unclear when or how North Korea imported the vehicles, but if confirmed to be genuine models, the trade would likely constitute a violation of U.N. Security Council sanctions that ban the transfer of both luxury goods and transportation vehicles of any kind to the DPRK.

Kim has appeared in new luxury Lexus LX SUVs of the previous generation and a new Mercedes sedan in recent years, and state media once showed him using a Rolls Royce Phantom.

The country has frequently [demonstrated](#) its ability to maintain specialized trade networks to import other banned vehicles in [recent years](#), while North Korea has continued to push forward its nuclear missile development despite sanctions.

*Edited by Bryan Betts*

ECONOMY

SANCTIONS



# Security Council

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## Note by the President of the Security Council

In paragraph 2 of resolution [2680 \(2023\)](#), the Security Council requested the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution [1874 \(2009\)](#) to provide a final report to the Council with its findings and recommendations. Accordingly, the President hereby circulates the report received from the Panel of Experts (see annex).



(d) With regard to the Member States requiring assistance with understanding and implementing the sectoral ban, the Committee consider information outreach.

#### **Implementation of the luxury goods ban**

85. The increase in foreign trade in 2023 (see paras. 78 and 79) facilitated the reappearance in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of an increasingly wide variety of foreign goods, some of which could be classified as luxury goods (see figure XIV).

86. The country's partners' trade statistics for first three quarters of 2023<sup>43</sup> (see para. 78) reflect the increased volumes of imported consumer goods with HS codes 42, 52, 57, 61, 64, 90, 91 and 92 – these commodity groups may include articles that can be classified as luxury goods.<sup>44</sup> Regional entrepôt zones are suspected to be one of the channels for such imports.<sup>45</sup> A think tank estimated that imports of luxury goods by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had reached \$40.64 million for the first half of 2023.<sup>46</sup>

**Figure XIV**  
**A “luxury goods” counter in the Golden Plaza shop in Pyongyang,  
 summer 2023**



*Source:* The Panel.

87. The Panel monitored new foreign motor vehicles appearing in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in considerable numbers (see figure XV). An apparently new Mercedes-Benz Maybach GLS 600 sport-utility vehicle and a Maybach S650 sedan were seen used by Kim Jong Un and high-ranking officials in November and December, and another Maybach was first seen at the same time.<sup>47</sup> A Lexus LX sport-

<sup>43</sup> ITC trade map.

<sup>44</sup> See [www.nknews.org/pro](http://www.nknews.org/pro) and annex 91.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, [www.nknews.org/pro](http://www.nknews.org/pro).

<sup>46</sup> See [http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/contents\\_view.htm?lang=e&menu\\_cate=northkorea&id=&board\\_seq=447742&page=1&board\\_code=](http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/contents_view.htm?lang=e&menu_cate=northkorea&id=&board_seq=447742&page=1&board_code=).

<sup>47</sup> See [www.nknews.org/2023/11/kim-jong-un-appears-to-import-luxury-maybach-lexus-suvs-](http://www.nknews.org/2023/11/kim-jong-un-appears-to-import-luxury-maybach-lexus-suvs-)

utility vehicle (released in 2022) and two Ford Transit vans (manufactured after 2021) were seen in November.<sup>48</sup> New luxury vehicles, among them Mercedes Benz and Lexus brands, were photographed in Pyongyang in December<sup>49</sup> (see annex 41). The Panel requested information from the relevant actors.

88. Toyota replied that the vehicle in the image appears to be a Lexus LX600 or a Lexus LX500d (see figure XV.D), manufactured after December 2021 in Japan (see annex 43).

**Figure XV  
Images of apparently new vehicles, November and December**

**A.**



**B.**




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despite-sanctions.

<sup>48</sup> See [www.nknews.org/2023/12/kim-jong-un-appears-with-new-ford-vans-in-rare-endorsement-of-american-brand](http://www.nknews.org/2023/12/kim-jong-un-appears-with-new-ford-vans-in-rare-endorsement-of-american-brand).

<sup>49</sup> See [www.nknews.org/2023/12/kim-jong-un-appears-to-reward-top-officials-with-luxury-mercedes-cars](http://www.nknews.org/2023/12/kim-jong-un-appears-to-reward-top-officials-with-luxury-mercedes-cars).

C.



D.



E.



F.



G.



Source: Korean Central Television, Korean Central News Agency, NK News and  
<https://m.posts.careerengine.us/p/658d2cc9311dd31682755e0f>. Annotation from original media sources.

89. The Panel investigated a report issued in December<sup>50</sup> on an alleged attempt to smuggle a Lexus vehicle (worth 10 million Japanese yen) into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea through a third country. The dealer claimed another third country to be the final destination. In reply to the Panel's request, Japan stated that "it is difficult ... to provide any information regarding this case because provision of such information could hinder the future investigation by the Police" (see annex 42).

90. The Panel investigated media reports with photographs of high-ranking officials of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea using luxury-brand items,<sup>51</sup> such as a Dior handbag (see figure XVI). Christian Dior Couture replied that the bag "could be the 'Sac Lady Dior Large' cuir de veau cannage ultramatte noir" bag, which was first

<sup>50</sup> See <https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASRD74HPKRD7OXIE001.html>. Accessed on 2 February 2024.

<sup>51</sup> See [www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20230917000117](http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20230917000117) and [www.nknews.org/2023/09/north-koreas-foreign-minister-totes-10k-ostrich-leather-gucci-bag-in-russia](http://www.nknews.org/2023/09/north-koreas-foreign-minister-totes-10k-ostrich-leather-gucci-bag-in-russia).

sold in February 2019 (see annex 44) and noted that it could not confirm the authenticity. The Panel continues investigating possible networks for the illegal supply of luxury items to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Figure XVI

**A member of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea delegation photographed with a handbag allegedly produced by Dior, September 2023**



Source: Korean Central News Agency and [www.thepost.co.nz/a/world-news/350078343/kims-bag-ladies-privileged-set](http://www.thepost.co.nz/a/world-news/350078343/kims-bag-ladies-privileged-set) (annotation from original media source).

### **Recommendations**

91. The Panel, taking into account the recently increased trans-shipments of luxury goods to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea via third countries, recommends that Member States urge entities involved in exporting luxury and brand goods to increase vigilance when arranging shipments to the region and via entrepôt zones.

92. The Panel recommends that Member States encourage exporters of luxury goods to include a contractual provision to prohibit the forwarding of goods to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

93. The Panel reiterates its recommendation that Member States consider updating their export control lists to reflect their lists of prohibited luxury goods in a manner consistent with the objectives of Security Council resolutions [1718 \(2006\)](#), [1874 \(2009\)](#), [2094 \(2013\)](#), [2270 \(2016\)](#) and [2321 \(2016\)](#), avoiding unnecessary broadening of their scope in order not to restrict the supply of unprohibited goods to the civilian population or have a negative humanitarian impact.



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## Note by the President of the Security Council

In paragraph 2 of resolution [2515 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council requested the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution [1874 \(2009\)](#) to provide a final report to the Council with its findings and recommendations.

Accordingly, the President hereby circulates the report received from the Panel of Experts (see annex).



**Annex 61: Images of Mercedes brand vehicles (Maybach Pullman W221, W221 restyling, S600 Landaulet) used by the DPRK leadership**



Source : <https://autoreview.ru/news/daimler-ne-v-kurse-gde-kim-chen-yn-vzyal-svoi-mersedesy>



Source : [https://vladnews.ru/2019-04-24/150341/prezidentskiy\\_kortezh](https://vladnews.ru/2019-04-24/150341/prezidentskiy_kortezh)



Source : <https://www.drive2.ru/c/471173169168777960/>

**Annex 62: Images of Lexus LX 570 vehicle used by Kim Jong Un (Agust 2020)**



*Source:* KCTV