

Seoul, Toyko pledge to work with US to combat cyber crime

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Workers remove a poster-banner for "The Interview" from a billboard in Hollywood, California, December 18, 2014

South Korea and Japan on Saturday vowed to work closely with the US to combat cyber crime, after Seoul blamed North Korea for a crippling cyber attack on Sony Pictures.

South Korea said it would share with Washington information "related to

the cyber attack on Sony," which it said bore all the hallmarks of an onslaught on its own banks and media agencies by the North last year.

Sony cancelled the Christmas Day release of "The Interview," a madcap romp about a CIA plot to kill North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un, after anonymous hackers invoked the 9/11 attacks in threatening cinemas screening the film.

"We express deep regret and condemn such North Korean activities as they seriously undermine the openness and security of [cyber space](#) and they constitute a crime that caused property losses," South Korea's foreign ministry said.

In a statement, it also noted "the similarities between the attacks on Sony Pictures and those against South Korean banks and others in March last year".

A spokesman for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told AFP that "the Japanese government is closely communicating with the United States and supporting its approach on this issue," without directly referencing North Korea.

"Cyber-attacking is a very significant problem concerning the national security, and the Japanese government strongly condemns the acts of hacking," the spokesman added.

An official investigation by South Korea blamed a cyber attack which completely shut down the networks of key TV broadcasters KBS, MBC and YTN, and crippled operations at three banks last year on North Korea's military intelligence agency.

Access records and the malicious codes used in the attack pointed to the North's military Reconnaissance General Bureau, the Korea Internet and

Security Agency (KISA) said, calling it a "premeditated, well-planned [cyber attack](#) by North Korea".

Professor Lim Jong-In of Korea University Graduate School of Information Security said the North has created its own army of cyber experts, around 1,000 of which work in China, who can "turn into hackers at a moment's notice and mount attacks".

"With 6,000 hackers under its cyber warfare command, it is counted as one of the world's top five countries in terms of cyber warfare capabilities. It selects some 300 students and raise them as elite cyber warriors every year," he told AFP.

"The North is one of the world's least wired states and therefore, it is quite safe from online counter-attacks."

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