

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: S Korea Bribery Probe into FFWPU Backfires

Knut Holdhus
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The boomerang effect. Illustration: Grok xAI



*South Korea's current president
Lee Jae-myung on June 4, 2025*

Special prosecutor inquiry backfires with Lee administration engulfed by expanding bribery probe aimed at political opposition and its perceived supporters

The Korea Times

The Korea Times, the oldest daily English-language newspaper in South Korea, published on 11th December an article carrying the headline "[Unification Church bribery scandal rocks Lee gov't](#)".

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According to the [report](#) written by Anna J. Park, South Korea is facing an escalating political scandal that now threatens to destabilize key elements of the administration of President Lee Jae-myung (이재명). The controversy centers on alleged

unlawful ties between prominent government officials and the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), formerly the [Unification Church](#) – a religious movement that has been catapulted onto the main stage of events in the country since the current government asked special prosecutors to investigate the [organization](#)'s relationship to the main opposition party.

However, the investigation has now taken an unexpected turn as it appears that also senior policymakers within Lee's own administration allegedly have accepted money or gifts from a [Family Federation](#) representative. This has already led to one cabinet resignation and placed several other high-ranking figures under scrutiny. As investigations ramp up, analysts warn that the scandal could have far-reaching implications not only for domestic governance but also for party cohesion and candidate selection ahead of next year's crucial local elections.

The [Family Federation](#) originated in Korea and is known internationally for attracting top political leaders to large peace events and for its global religious network. Recently, the [religious organization](#) has been the subject of renewed public debate, particularly following allegations about outreach to South Korean

political figures and the indictment of [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), a former senior [Federation](#) official, on charges related to delivering high-value gifts to the former First Lady. The current wave of allegations indicates that Yoon's political entanglements may run deeper than previously acknowledged, cutting across party lines and affecting bureaucrats at the highest levels of government.



The Korea Times reports that Oceans and Fisheries Minister Chun Jae-soo (전재수) is at the center of this latest episode. He submitted his resignation after being accused of accepting between 30 and 40 million won (roughly USD 20,000-27,000) in cash, as well as two luxury watches, from an individual linked to the [Family Federation](#). While Chun has vehemently denied any wrongdoing, he stated that stepping down was necessary to prevent further disruption to governance and to allow investigative authorities to proceed without political distraction. His departure marks the first resignation of a minister since the Lee administration took office in June and has intensified scrutiny of potential misconduct involving other cabinet members and senior officials.

Chun's alleged connection to the [religious organization](#) appears to have arisen from its efforts to secure political backing for an ambitious infrastructure project – an [undersea tunnel](#) intended to physically link South Korea and Japan. While such proposals have circulated for decades, they have often attracted skepticism due to geopolitical sensitivities and cost concerns. Any suggestion that a government minister accepted gifts in exchange for influence over such a major initiative has therefore resonated sharply with the public and the political establishment.



Upon returning to the country from a United Nations meeting, Chun declared that he had "never engaged in any illegal exchange of money," describing the allegations as entirely baseless. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that remaining in office during an active investigation could create the perception of impropriety. The presidential office later confirmed that President Lee accepted Chun's resignation, signaling the administration's intent to cooperate with a broad investigation into political ties with the [Family Federation](#) – an investigation the president himself ordered earlier in the week.

According to the [Korea Times article](#), the expanding inquiry originated from testimony provided by [Yoon Yeong-ho](#), formerly the head of the [Family Federation](#)'s global headquarters. As part of a corruption probe, Yoon reportedly informed investigators that the [Federation](#) had provided financial support not only to politicians from the conservative People Power Party (PPP), but also to members of President Lee's ruling Democratic Party of Korea (DPK). Such claims, if substantiated, may suggest a pattern of influence-seeking that transcends partisan boundaries.



One of the officials named in Yoon's testimony is Unification Minister Chung Dong-young (정동영). In a strongly worded statement, Chung categorically denied any involvement, asserting that he met [Yoon](#) only once – briefly and casually – in 2021. According to Chung, the conversation lasted approximately ten minutes and focused solely on inter-Korean affairs. He emphasized that he has never met the [Family Federation](#)'s leader, [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), and framed the allegations as an attack on his personal reputation. He also pledged to pursue legal action against media outlets that, in his view, published unsubstantiated claims.

Similar allegations have surfaced regarding the National Intelligence Service (NIS) Director, Lee Jong-seok (이종석). Lee confirmed that he met [Yoon](#) and other [Family Federation](#) officials once in 2022 at their request to discuss North Korean matters, but he denied receiving any money or inappropriate favors. Beyond these individuals, additional current and former lawmakers associated with the ruling party are reportedly under investigation, raising concerns that the political scandal could widen significantly.

The political consequences are already visible. Within the governing party, there is deep concern that sustained public attention to the scandal could undermine the administration's ability to execute its policy agenda. The episode is particularly damaging because Minister Chun was considered a leading contender for next year's mayoral race in Busan, South Korea's second-largest city. Losing a candidate with that level of visibility alters the party's electoral calculus and potentially weakens its position heading into the 2026 local elections.



*National Intelligence Service
(NIS) Director, Lee Jong-seok*

The opposition People Power Party (PPP) has seized the moment to launch an aggressive counteroffensive, branding the controversy "Unification Church-gate". The PPP had previously faced accusations of its own connections to the religious organization – scrutiny triggered by allegations involving one of its lawmakers and the former first lady.

The party has now filed multiple police complaints targeting Chun and several DPK lawmakers, asserting that they violated the [Political Funds Act](#) and accepted bribes. PPP floor leader Song Eon-seok (송언석) argued that the emerging evidence points to a "deeply troubling" relationship between the governing Lee administration and the [Family Federation](#), suggesting that the delicate matter extends well beyond isolated misconduct.

Police are currently reviewing the complaints and beginning to schedule questioning for individuals implicated in the testimony. Under South Korean law, alleged violations of the [Political Funds Act](#) must be prosecuted within seven years; if improper payments were made in 2018, that window will close at the end of this year. However, should investigators pursue more serious bribery charges, the statute of limitations could extend up to fifteen years, significantly broadening the scope for legal action.

As the investigations progress, it has become evident that they are now backfiring on the Lee administration. The process began when the current government appointed special prosecutors to examine alleged unlawful actions involving the main opposition party.

However, the findings that have since emerged represent a significant stress test for the administration's commitment to transparency and political accountability. How the government navigates the resulting fallout will shape public perceptions of its integrity and influence both its legislative capacity and its electoral prospects in the year ahead.

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delivered to Democratic Party lawmakers. It contains allegations that the governing Democratic Party will not find easy to respond to.

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The recent revelations emerging from the investigation into alleged political lobbying by figures connected to the [Family Federation](#) have opened an unexpected and potentially consequential chapter in South Korea's ongoing political discourse. What began primarily as an inquiry into whether individuals within or around the previously ruling *People Power Party* may have received money or favors from the [religious organization](#) is now broadening in scope, following testimony that implicates senior members of the governing *Democratic Party* as well.



Yoon Yeong-ho, 5th Dec. 2021. Screenshot from live transmission from an international rally by [FFWPU](#).

At the center of this expanding controversy is [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), the former head of the [Family Federation's](#) World Headquarters, who is currently in detention and on trial for delivering money and valuables to individuals close to First Lady Kim Keon-hee (김건희) through a figure known publicly as "Geonjin Beopsa", a fortune-teller named Jeon Seong-bae (전성배).

During interviews with the team of Special Prosecutor Min Jung-gi (민중기), [Yoon](#) reportedly acknowledged that his activities went beyond contact with conservative political circles. He stated that he had also provided substantial financial support – amounting to tens of millions of won – to influential *Democratic Party* lawmakers during the Moon Jae-in (문재인) administration.

These remarks, first revealed through *The Hankyoreh's* reporting, raise questions about the breadth of [Yoon's](#) political engagements and whether investigators adequately examined all sides of the alleged lobbying network. With only about three weeks left before the special prosecutor's mandate runs out, the disclosures have triggered debate about potential investigative blind spots and the broader implications for political accountability.

According to the newspaper's findings, [Yoon's](#) testimony came during early August interviews, at a stage when the investigation was still beginning to take shape. Yoon is said to have asserted that he delivered tens of millions of won each to two senior *Democratic Party* politicians during the Moon Jae-in administration (2017-2022).

The large daily reports that Yoon further stated that these politicians had visited the *Cheon Jeong Temple* – one of the [Family Federation's](#) central holy sites located in Gapyeong,



Moon Jae-in, President of South Korea 2017-2022. Photo: The White House, Washington DC / Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain image](#). Cropped



One of the sacred sites of the [Family Federation](#) – the *Cheon Jeong Temple* in Gapyeong, South Korea. The building houses a museum in honor of the life of the [True Parents](#). Photo: [FFWPU](#)

Gyeonggi Province – where they met with [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), the leader and widow of the man she founded the [Federation](#) with – [Sun Myung Moon](#) (문선명). According to Yoon, the lawmakers were given funds following these visits.

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The [Hankyoreh](#) newspaper is known for its investigative reporting and critical coverage of government power – especially conservative administrations. Now it seems the paper is also taking a closer look at the ruling [Democratic Party](#).

The daily writes that one of the two individuals [Yoon](#) mentioned, is reportedly still serving as a Democratic Party lawmaker representing a constituency in the Yeongnam region. The other is a former member of the National Assembly. [Yoon](#)

allegedly told investigators that between 2018 and 2019, he delivered 40 million won (US \$ 27,200) in cash and a luxury watch valued at about 10 million won (US \$ 6,800) to the sitting lawmaker. To the former lawmaker, he said he provided 30 million won (US \$ 20,400) in 2020. These claims were not formalized in a written statement but were instead documented in an investigative report summarizing his interview.

[Yoon](#) elaborated on these points during his 5th December court appearance before the 27th Criminal Division of the *Seoul Central District Court*. There, he described himself as having been closer to the [Democratic Party](#) than to the *People Power Party* during the years 2017 to 2021. He also added that several [Democratic Party](#)-affiliated figures had direct interactions with [Hak Ja Han](#).

[Yoon](#) asserted that he had provided the special prosecutor with a list containing four individuals – including an incumbent official at the ministerial level and sitting National Assembly members – to whom he claimed some form of support had been given. His remarks suggested that [Family Federation](#) outreach had not been ideologically one-sided but instead had sought political connections across the aisle, under the broader narrative of promoting national unity.

However, even as he affirmed that he had shared this information with investigators, [Yoon](#) did not disclose specific names during the court session, nor did he describe in detail the scale or nature of any alleged exchanges. His statements nonetheless introduce a new dimension to the investigation, broadening what had been largely viewed as a case involving elements within conservative political circles.

The [article](#) notes that the special prosecutor's team declined to answer the *Hankyoreh Shimbun's* questions about whether it had pursued follow-up investigations into the [Democratic Party](#) side of the allegations. Meanwhile, both lawmakers identified by [Yoon](#) have categorically denied his claims. The sitting lawmaker dismissed suggestions that he had ever visited the *Cheon Jeong Temple* or received large sums of cash or an expensive watch from the [religious organization](#). The former lawmaker likewise stated that he had never met [Hak Ja Han](#) nor received any financial support from [Family Federation](#) affiliates.

As the investigation approaches its endpoint, these revelations place pressure on the special prosecutor to account for the breadth and even-handedness of its inquiries. Whether [Yoon's](#) statements will lead to new investigative action or political repercussions remains uncertain, but they have undeniably complicated the narrative surrounding the [Family Federation's](#) alleged role in political influence-peddling.

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Featured image above: *Hankyoreh* journalists at work. Illustration: Microsoft Designer Image Creator, with added logos, 6th December 2025.

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The special prosecutors have no comment on investigations into the Democratic Party. Here, Chief Special Prosecutor Min Jung-gi (민중기) who sent [Dr. Hak Ja Han](#) and Pastor Son Hyun-bo to long-term detention. Min is the head of a huge team of special prosecutors with extensive investigative powers. Image generated by Chat GPT September 2025.

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