

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Investigators Investigated In S. Korean Bribery Crisis

Knut Holdhus
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Special Prosecutor's Office being raided by police. Illustration: Grok xAI

Raids on prosecutors and detention center mark unprecedented escalation in bribery probe as investigators come under investigation



A Yonhap News Agency report of 15th December 2025 documents a corruption investigation of exceptional breadth and institutional sensitivity in contemporary South Korean politics. The article written by Chae Yun-hwan carried the headline "[Unification Church leader named suspect in bribery case involving politicians](#)".

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Now also being raided by police: The Seoul Detention Center. Here, its gate in November 2025

While allegations of bribery involving religious organizations and politicians are not unprecedented, the present case stands apart because of the unprecedented decision by police to conduct coordinated raids today, 15th December, not only on [Family Federation](#) facilities and politicians' residences, but also on the

Special Prosecutor's Office and the Seoul Detention Center. These actions signal a level of institutional distrust and procedural escalation that elevates the affair beyond a conventional bribery probe and into a crisis implicating the integrity of the justice system itself.

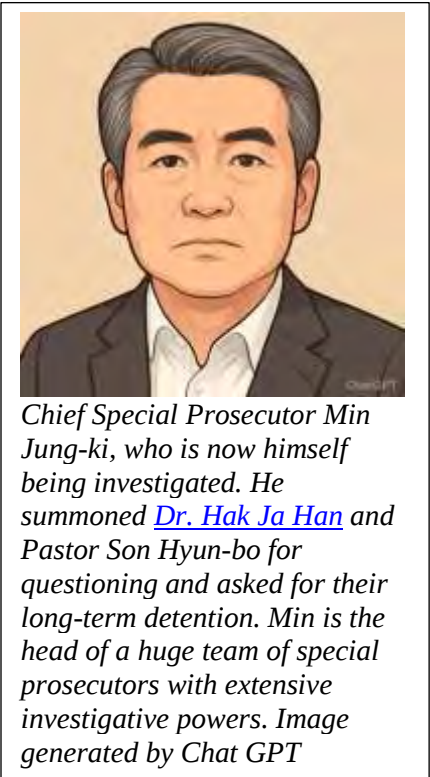
According to the [report](#), the leader and co-founder of the [Family Federation](#), [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자), also called [Mother Han](#), is at the center of the current investigation. She has been named a suspect for allegedly providing unlawful funds and luxury items to politicians across party lines, in violation of the Political Funds Act.



The breadth of alleged recipients – spanning former cabinet ministers and lawmakers from both conservative and progressive camps – supports the prosecution's emerging narrative that there has been a systematic, non-partisan strategy of political influence rather than isolated acts of favoritism. This interpretation is reinforced by courtroom testimony from former [Federation](#) official [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호) asserting that support was deliberately extended to both ruling and opposition figures.

What renders this case extraordinary, however, is not merely the alleged conduct of a powerful religious organization, but the investigators' implicit challenge to other state institutions. The raid on the Seoul Detention Center, where [Mother Han](#) is currently held, underscores the determination of police to secure primary evidence without reliance on custodial intermediaries. Such an action suggests concern over potential evidence suppression or incomplete cooperation, an unusual implication when directed at a correctional facility operating under strict procedural norms.

Even more striking is the search of the Special Prosecutor's Office itself. The police justification – that records may not have been fully transferred when the case changed hands – goes beyond administrative oversight and enters the realm of alleged investigative bias.



By targeting the office of Special Counsel Min Jung-gi (민중기), police are effectively asserting that an institution specifically created to ensure independence and impartiality in high-level corruption cases may itself have failed to meet those standards. This development reframes the investigation as not only a matter of bribery, but also of institutional accountability and jurisdictional conflict within the prosecutorial apparatus.

Politically, the implications are severe. The involvement of figures linked to both major parties undermines attempts to frame the investigation as partisan retaliation, while the reference to alleged preferential treatment toward politicians affiliated with the former president's party raises questions about selective enforcement and politicized justice. The resignations, denials, and counter-accusations that follow are likely to deepen public cynicism not only toward alleged religious power brokers but toward state institutions as well.

The [Yonhap report](#) depicts a moment in which the investigation itself becomes a subject of scrutiny. The raids on the Special Prosecutor's Office and the Seoul Detention Center symbolize a breakdown of presumed institutional trust, marking this case as a rare instance where the boundaries between suspect, investigator, and overseer are simultaneously contested.

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In Korea, special prosecutors are appointed precisely to avoid political interference, and their credibility rests on independence and impartiality. The [editorial](#) stresses that this credibility has been seriously damaged. If investigators appeared reluctant to pursue politically inconvenient leads, the entire investigation risks being seen as compromised. The [paper](#) therefore urges the *National Police Agency's National Office of Investigation* to treat the special prosecutor's missteps as a warning and to reestablish public trust by conducting a thorough, unbiased inquiry focused solely on facts and evidence.

10th July 2024, Photo: Jim Bourg/U.S. Department of State. [Public domain image](#). Cropped

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Yoon Yeong-ho, Dec 6, 2020. Screenshot from Peacelink TV

Beyond procedural concerns, the editorial expresses unease about the broader social atmosphere surrounding the case. It notes that unverified claims, rumors, and speculative interpretations are circulating freely, often amplified by media commentary.

While allegations that [Yoon](#) violated campaign finance or political funding laws are legitimate matters for investigation and adjudication, the [editorial](#) criticizes what it describes as guilt by association. Individuals are reportedly being stigmatized simply for having met [Yoon](#) socially or for participating in events organized by the [Family Federation](#), such as delivering congratulatory speeches. The [paper](#) characterizes this as a modern form of "witch hunt", warning that such behavior undermines

the presumption of innocence.

A key theme of the [editorial](#) is concern over religious discrimination. The [Family Federation](#) is a minority religious group in South Korea and has long faced persecution. The [editorial](#) argues that treating interactions between politicians and religious leaders as inherently suspicious – solely because the religion is unpopular or unfamiliar – reflects intolerance rather than democratic maturity. It suggests that the scandal is being exploited either to score political points or to deliberately tarnish the image of the [religious organization](#) itself, rather than to pursue justice.



President Lee Jae-myung, here, 25th August 2025, in the Oval Office. Official White House Photo by Emily J. Higgins. [Public domain image](#). Cropped

The controversy escalated further when President Lee Jae-myung (이재명) during an official meeting publicly mentioned the possibility of dissolving religious corporations. Although he did not explicitly name the [Family Federation](#), the [editorial](#) notes that the context made the target clear.

This remark drew criticism because [Yoon's](#) criminal case has not yet concluded even at the trial court level. In South Korea, where separation of powers is constitutionally emphasized, presidential comments on ongoing investigations or trials are highly sensitive. The [editorial](#) reminds readers that the Supreme Court has historically exercised extreme caution when dealing with the dissolution of religious entities, precisely to protect freedom of religion – a core constitutional value. Against this backdrop, the president's remarks are portrayed as ill-timed and potentially inappropriate.

The [editorial](#) also addresses the response of the [Family Federation](#) itself. Its Korean affiliate recently issued a [public apology](#), acknowledging responsibility for causing public concern. The [organization](#) pledged to formalize political neutrality, improve transparency in its governance, and strengthen accountability within its leadership. It also promised to engage more openly with Korean society in an effort to rebuild trust. While the [editorial](#) welcomes these commitments, it cautions that they must not be superficial or merely tactical responses to public pressure. Instead, it calls for sustained, concrete reforms carried out with genuine resolve.

In conclusion, the [editorial](#) reiterates its central message: the truth of the [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) lobbying allegations must be determined through rigorous legal processes, not through political calculation, media sensationalism, or public prejudice. Allowing religious bias or partisan interests to influence investigations would not only distort justice in this case, but also weaken democratic norms more broadly. For the rule of law to prevail, the editorial insists, restraint, fairness, and institutional integrity must guide every step of the process.

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Featured image above: A modern-day South Korean witch hunt. Illustration: Grok xAI, 14th December 2025, edited.

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