

FFWPU Europe and Middle East: S Korea Rulers Use Triviality to Hide Vast Failure

Knut Holdhus
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[Yoon yeong-ho](#) speaking at a gathering in Gapyeong, South Korea on May 8, 2020

After months of costly investigations, long-term detentions, and public spectacle, the headline-grabbing revelation now is a scarf and a tie



Min Joong-gi the head of an army of special prosecutors with extensive investigative powers.

Image: Grok xAI

It is unfolding in a country that, according to recent media reports, can no longer afford to pay its own armed forces. The money, it appears, has instead been diverted to sustaining a vast army of special prosecutors tasked with determining whether a former president – and certain religious figures perceived to have supported him – have in any way crossed the law. The laws in question largely inhabit the grey zone at the intersection of religion and politics, where boundaries are porous and interpretation does most of the work.

Complicating matters further, it has emerged that members of the current administration now championing these investigations may themselves have engaged in precisely the same conduct for which leading figures of the opposition stand accused. Judging by the sheer volume and intensity of media coverage devoted to every procedural detail, this has become such an all-consuming national fixation that the current opposition leader has launched a [hunger strike](#) – protesting the Lee administration's apparent reluctance to apply the same investigative zeal to cases implicating its own

ranks.



Chosun Ilbo

After months of investigations, long-term detentions, and public spectacle involving both political and religious leaders, the latest twist may strike outside observers as bordering on the absurd. The headline-grabbing revelation now dominating coverage is not a financial transaction or a policy decision, but a scarf and a tie –

allegedly presented as a gift by the ailing "[Mother of Peace](#)", [Hak Ja Han](#) (82), to former president Yoon Suk-yeol four years ago.

One of South Korea's largest dailies, the Chosun Ilbo, published on 16th January an article headlined "[Yoon Yeong-ho: 'Chairwoman Hak Ja Han Personally Handed Me a Tie as a Gift for Yoon'](#)". The [piece](#) contains reports of courtroom testimony that according to the paper significantly reframes the ongoing investigation into alleged collusion between the [Family Federation](#) – formerly the [Unification Church](#) – and political power during South Korea's 2022 presidential transition.

At the center of the testimony is [Yoon Yeong-ho](#) (윤영호), former World Headquarters Director of the [Family Federation](#), who stated under oath that Chairwoman [Hak Ja Han](#) (한학자) personally authorized and facilitated political outreach to then President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol (윤석열), including the delivery

of a scarf and a tie as gifts. This testimony directly challenges earlier claims from [Chairwoman Han](#)'s camp that any political engagement was undertaken independently by subordinates and without her involvement.



In same detention center as [Mother Han](#): Former President Yoon Suk-yeol of the Republic of Korea April 25, 2023, in Maryland, USA

According to [Yoon Yeong-ho](#), his actions on 22nd March 2022 were neither spontaneous nor personal. He testified before the Seoul Central District Court (Criminal Division 27) that he had fully reported to [Chairwoman Han](#) in advance about his scheduled meeting with President-elect Yoon Suk Yeol at the Presidential Transition Committee office.

On the morning of that day, People Power Party lawmaker Kwon Seong-dong (권성동) reportedly visited [Chairwoman Han](#), informed her of the confirmed meeting time, and discussed the forthcoming encounter. Yoon stated that this exchange occurred openly and that [Chairwoman Han](#) was fully aware of, and engaged in, the political context of the meeting.

Most consequentially, [Yoon](#) testified that [Chairwoman Han](#) personally handed him a scarf and a tie, explicitly identifying them as gifts for President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol. This act, he emphasized, took place in the presence of senior aides and party figures, suggesting deliberate and formal intent rather than a private or symbolic gesture. This assertion contradicts prior statements from [Chairwoman Han](#)'s representatives that she was "unrelated to politics" and that any gift-giving or political contact

was conducted unilaterally by [Yoon Yeong-ho](#).

The legal significance of a scarf and a tie lies not in their material value but in their context. Under South Korean law – particularly the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act (Kim Young-ran Act) and the Political Funds Act – any provision of goods, services, or benefits to a public official or president-elect by an interested organization can constitute an illegal inducement if it is connected to influence, access, or political favor.



Perceived to have supported the former president: [Mother Han](#), as she appeared on South Korean TV in Sep. 2025

Religious organizations are subject to these restrictions when they engage in political activity. A gift delivered during a presidential transition, from the de facto leader of a powerful religious organization, may therefore be construed as an attempt to establish influence or goodwill at a sensitive constitutional moment. The issue is not whether the items were luxurious, but whether they symbolized an improper relationship between religious authority and state power.

[Yoon Yeong-ho](#)'s testimony also raises questions of consistency and credibility. Earlier in the controversy, he had been portrayed – by both the [Family Federation](#) and its leadership – as acting independently, without explicit authorization from [Chairwoman Han](#). His courtroom statements now reverse that narrative, placing responsibility squarely at the top of the [organization](#) – at least for this particular incident. This shift may reflect a strategic legal recalibration, an effort to distribute liability, or a response to evidentiary pressure. Regardless of motive, the contradiction certainly weakens prior claims that [Chairwoman Han](#) was detached from political operations.

Finally, testimony from other [Family Federation](#) affiliates broadened the scope of the allegations. Witnesses indicated that political engagement was not limited to the conservative People Power Party but extended to the Democratic Party of Korea as well, suggesting a pattern of cross-party outreach aimed at safeguarding institutional interests rather than ideological alignment. This reinforces prosecutorial claims that the [Federation](#) pursued systematic political influence, rather than isolated or incidental contact.

Taken together, the testimony presented on 16th January could mark a pivotal moment in the case. In the current South Korean political climate, it looks like the army of special prosecutors will do their best to transform what had been framed as individual overreach into a potential example of organized, top-down political intervention by a [religious institution](#), with legal consequences extending well beyond a scarf and a tie.

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Hunger Strike Escalates Clash Over New Probes

- January 16, 2026
- Knut Holdhus



Opposition accuses ruling party of blocking new probes as political tensions rise, and opposition leader begins hunger strike

Chosun Ilbo, the large South Korean daily newspaper, brought on 15th January a news report titled "Jang Dong-hyuk: 'I Will Begin a Hunger Strike Urging Acceptance of Special Prosecutor Probes into Nomination Bribes and the Unification Church'" (translated from Korean)



The logo of the Chosun Ilbo

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This is by many regarded as South Korean politics entering another phase of confrontation. Jang Dong-hyuk (장동혁) is the leader of the conservative *People Power Party* (PPP). He announced that he would begin a hunger strike to pressure the National Assembly to approve special prosecutor investigations into alleged political corruption. His statement was made during a protest rally at the National Assembly complex in Seoul, organized to condemn what opposition parties described as the



Logo of the People Power Party

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ruling *Democratic Party of Korea's* (DPK) unilateral handling of special prosecutor legislation.

The logic behind the hunger strike appears to be Jang Dong-hyuk attempting to dramatize what he describes as a refusal to allow full transparency when politically powerful governing party figures may be at risk. The *People Power Party* (PPP), the *Reform Party*, and allied opposition figures argue that the *Democratic Party of Korea* (DPK) opposes the two proposed special prosecutor probes precisely because they could implicate DPK lawmakers and senior figures. Basically, the opposition frames the DPK's resistance as self-protective – a way to limit political fallout rather than a principled objection.

더불어
민주당

2024 logo of the *Democratic Party of South Korea*. *Public domain image.*

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Under investigation: Yoon Yeong-ho, here 22nd April 2023. Screenshot from FFWPU video

According to the *Chosun Ilbo report*, at the center of the dispute are two proposed new investigations. The first concerns alleged "nomination donations", meaning illicit money allegedly exchanged in return for favorable treatment during party candidate selection processes. The second involves claims that politicians across party lines may have received funds or other benefits from the *Family Federation* – by many still called by its former name the *Unification Church* – during several years when *Yoon Yeong-ho* (윤영호) held a leading position within the religious organization.

Supporters of the investigations argue that these issues warrant independent scrutiny through special prosecutors, who in South Korea are appointed outside the regular prosecutorial system to investigate politically sensitive cases.

PPP leader Jang stated that he would begin his hunger strike at the exact moment another opposition lawmaker, Cheon Ha-ram (천하람) of the minor *Reform Party*, launched a filibuster in the National Assembly chamber. By choosing the Rotunda Hall – symbolically described as a place "where the voices of the people gather" – Jang sought to frame his protest as a moral appeal rather than a purely procedural tactic. Hunger strikes have a long history in South Korean politics and activism, often used to dramatize claims that normal democratic mechanisms are being blocked.

Chosun Ilbo writes that Jang in his remarks accused the DPK not only of rejecting the special prosecutor bills, but of doing so out of fear that investigations would expose corruption within its own ranks. He claimed that if certain seized phones and records were fully examined, they would implicate senior *Democratic Party* figures and even former presidential officials. He further alleged that an investigation into a former cabinet minister would reveal a broader pattern of politicians receiving money from the *Family Federation*. These claims remain allegations, but they form the core of the opposition's argument that independent investigations are necessary precisely because ordinary prosecutorial processes may be politically constrained.



Cheon Ha-ram (천하람), floor leader of the Reform Party (개혁신당). Photo (2023): 이데일리TV. License: CC Attr 3.0 Unp. Cropped



Min Joong-gi (민중기), the head of a huge team of special prosecutors with extensive investigative powers. Image: Grok xAI, January 2026.

For those unfamiliar with South Korean politics, it is important to understand that special prosecutors have been overused in recent years as political weapons, often driven by the wish to damage rivals rather than uncover truth. Even though the governing *Democratic Party* itself instigated large investigation led by special prosecutors it appointed, party leaders are now claiming that existing prosecutors and oversight institutions are sufficient, and that repeated special investigations undermine institutional stability. Critics, however, counter that prosecutors themselves are subject to political pressure, making special prosecutors essential in cases involving powerful figures.

Opposition figures like Jang frame the DPK's position differently. They argue that the ruling party dropped or blocked the investigations because it anticipates severe political damage if the probes proceed. According to this view, the DPK fears that even the process of investigation – regardless of eventual findings – could erode public trust and threaten its hold on power. Jang explicitly suggested that the ruling party "knows its administration would collapse" if the investigations moved forward, portraying the refusal as an act of self-preservation rather than principle.

The broader political background is one of intense polarization. South Korea's legislature has increasingly seen filibusters, fast-tracked bills, and street-style protests inside parliamentary grounds. Special prosecutors, originally intended as exceptional tools, have become central to this struggle, symbolizing competing visions of accountability and governance. To supporters, they represent transparency and justice; to critics, political escalation and institutional fatigue.

Jang concluded his remarks with a familiar Korean proverb: "The darkest hour is just before dawn." By this, he sought to reassure supporters that political reform and accountability would ultimately prevail. Whether his hunger strike and the renewed push for special prosecutors will change the legislative outcome remains uncertain, but the episode highlights how deeply questions of corruption, religion, and political power remain intertwined in South Korean democracy.

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Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

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