

Itaewon Disaster: Who Killed 158 Children?

The system killed them and the wrong leader killed the system

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In the evening of October 29, 130,000 men and women wearing Halloween costumes went to Itaewon area in Seoul to have fun and enjoy the freedom from 3-year COVID-19 confinement.

The joyful laughter, merry songs and cry of freedom suddenly turned into voice of despair, fear, agony and last fading voice of dying children calling for loved family and friends.

On narrow and steep alley, tens of thousands of people were pushing and shoving and the people at the lower part of the alley were crushed to death under the weight of layers of human bodies.

It was a man-made disaster which should not happen, which could not happen. But it happened and it took away 158 precious and young lives including 26 foreign persons and injured 198 people.

The world is asking how such disaster can happen in a country like South Korea which is known as model country for economic development, security, safety and democracy, especially under the liberal government of Moon Jae-in.

The question the world is asking why this man-made disaster happened in South Korea.

What I am going to say may disturb some and even infuriate some others. But, it is about the time that the world should be aware of the disturbing political reality which is, in the final analysis, responsible for the disaster.

I am writing this paper hoping that the world opinion will be formed and put pressure on the South Korean government so that hidden truth be discovered, the responsible people be punished and similar man-made disaster never happens again.

I am offering my sincere condolence to the surviving parents including 26 surviving parents of foreign countries.

I hope also that the surviving parents of foreign countries join Koreans in fighting for the truth of why and how their children died.

This paper examines the following:

- Failure of the Public Safety System
- Reasons for the System Failure
- Impact of the Disaster on Politics of South Korea

Failure of the public safety system

The low priority given to the public safety is responsible for the disaster. It is argued that, in this paper, the public safety failed due to absence of public safety planning.

A good system of public safety planning should include the following: prior safety planning, disaster management, post disaster analysis and judicial measure designed to prevent similar disaster in the future.

But in this section, I will deal with the prior planning and disaster management.

Prior planning: The prior planning for the event of Halloween festivity should be the responsibility of the mayor of Yongsan District where Itaewon is located. But, the mayor for some mysterious reasons failed to do so.

This is difficult to understand in view of the fact that Yongsan District (ward) had undertaken, for years in the past, large scale events in the Itaewon area including the Halloween festivities.

What the Yongsan District government did was the planning only for traffic ticket control and rubbish collection excluding safety planning for the Halloween crowd.

In other words, there was no prior safety planning at all to protect the young Halloween lovers. This is incomprehensible in view of the fact that a very large crowd was expected to converge toward the Itaewon area.

Management of the disaster: In the absence of prior safety planning, it was not easy to conduct properly the crowd management. Before anything else, the communication network did not work.

Somebody should have reported the danger and somebody should have sent help. In this case, the help was the Korean National Police Special Operation Unit (KNPSOU). In fact, somebody reported the danger, but no help came.

On the day of the disaster, October 29, already at 16:00, the Halloween crowd started to increase in size. By 18:00, on a narrow and steep alley, there were so many people that

somebody called the 112 emergency call center to explain the situation and asked for help which did not come.

The following is the list of SOS calls: 18:34; 20:09; 20:33; 20:53; 21:00; 21:02; 21:07; 21:10; 21:51; 22:11. There were 11 calls. On this list, one call is missing.

We can see that the calls for help became dramatically more frequent after 21:00. This shows that the number of deaths was increasing rapidly after 21:00.

As the time went by, there were 30 people in a space of 8 m². A large crowd was going up the alley, while equally large crowd was coming down the alley. And somewhere in the alley, the two crowds collided and many people fell and crushed to death by the weight of layers of human bodies. They could not breathe, they died.

The hellish drama continued until 22:30 and 158 young lives were sacrificed because of the stupidity, the cruelty and irresponsibility of adults who should have known better.

The deployment of one special operation units of police (KNPSOU) could prevent the disaster. They were near the scene of the disaster, but they did not come, because somebody decided not to send them to the scene of the disaster.

In short, the disaster management went nowhere. Those who could prevent the disaster were not on duty at crucial time.

Park Hee-yong, mayor of Yongsan District government saw the massing crowd, but she was not there to prevent the tragedy.

Lee Jae-hee: Yongsan District Police chief was aware of the crisis and asked Seoul Metropolitan Police agency for the deployment of the KNPSOU specialized in managing large crowd. But no help came.

Ryu Mi-jin, chief of the 112 call center was absent in the room managing the emergency calls.

Kim Gwang-ho Seoul Metropolitan Police chief was not present in his office. He was at home at the night of October 29 and received the report after midnight.

Yoon hee-geun, chief of the National Police Agency went to his home town and camping sight at the night of October 29. He received the report after midnight.

The location of Kim Soon-ho, the chief of the Department of Police of the Ministry of Interior and Public Safety was not known. This department was created illegally to control the police force to be politically used.

On the other hand, the chief of Yongsan fire station, Choi Seon-beon, went to the scene too late to save the lives.

Lee Sang-min, Minister of Interior and Public Safety was nowhere. After all, he is the minister responsible for public safety in Korea.

Nobody knows exactly where the president, Yoon Suk-yeol was during mass killing. In the final analysis, he had the ultimate responsibility of the disaster.

So, there is no doubt that the public safety system failed to save lives. But, we ask questions why the system failed.

Reasons for the Failure of the Public Safety System

We know how the tragedy happened. But, nobody knows why it happened. However, many tend to relate the disaster to unusual and irrational behaviours of the president, Yoon Suk-yeol, his wife, Kim Gun-hee and shaman called, Cheon-gong.

Let me begin by introducing Yoon Suk-yeol, president of South Korea since May 9 this year.

First, he knows very little about economics, national security, international relations and, especially public administration.

Second, he is turning the time machine backward; he is living in Korea of fifty years ago of military dictatorship. He has become a prosecutor and spent all his life of suspecting people as possible criminals, indicting, investigation and sending them to prison.

He looks at the world through the eyes of a prosecutor not through the eyes of a politician.

To make the matter worse, he tries to solve political issues as criminal issue. He lacks the qualities of understanding, communicating and compromising with others, the qualities essential for a good political leader.

Third, he has been a worst biased prosecutor. His mother-in-law is a well established criminal, but she has never been fully punished for her crimes including the embezzlement of public funds.

His wife is notorious for all kinds of illegal and immoral activities including the manipulation of stock prices and the plagiarism of her academic degrees in corrupted ways. She has never been indicted because of the influence of her husband.

Fourth, he is even suspected as alcoholic. He often misses major decision making meetings due, probably, to his alcoholism.

Fifth, this is very serious aspects of Yoon Suk-yeol. In Korea, there is a shaman called Cheon-gong who pretends to be the last saviour of humanity sent by God.

In a country where the freedom of religion is guaranteed, the existence of the shaman Cheon-gong is not a legal problem.

What follows will certainly scandalize the world. It is a sad reality in a country like Korea which is the 10th largest economy in the world.

What I am saying about the shaman, Cheong-gong, is based on several information sources including KBS report, MBC report, the recent Ohmynews report and even the ParisMatch report (November 4) on the Itaewon tragedy.

To be sure, in a democratic country like Korea where religious freedom is guaranteed, shaman can exist.

But, the problem is the fact that the president and his wife are faithful followers of the

shaman, who declared that Yoon's wife, Kim Gun-hee had been attending for years his lectures, while the president meets the shaman often. Therefore, one can say that the shaman and the president's couple are very close to each other.

To make the matter worse, the shaman can influence the major decisions of the president and his wife. A recent poll (das-bei-da-238) shows that 54.5% of the respondents says that the shaman exert influence on the president's policy decisions.

The shaman Cheon-gong's vision is that the world should be ruled by "jung-bop" (rightful laws) which is not spelled out. But, it seems that the shaman wants to rule the world according to his perception of what is right or wrong with the help of somebody. Somebody seems to be Yoon Suk-yeol.

Here are some known cases showing the close relationship between the Shaman and Yoon's couple.

- The Shaman asked Yoon to leave the position of prosecutor general and run for the presidential candidacy, which Yoon did.
- Cheon-gong asked Yoon to stamp the Chinese figure "king" (王) on the palm of his hands. Yoon showed it during the televised presidential debate. This Chinese figure is supposed to bring good fortune.
- Once Yoon became president, the shaman told Yoon not to move into the Blue House (Korean White House) because evil spirits of many dead people may get into Yoon, which Yoon obeyed.
- The shaman would have asked Yoon to install the president's office to the Yongsan area (south of Han River). Yoon Suk-yeol moved his presidential office to the Yongsan area.

The Shaman is reported to have said about the Yongsan area.

"The dragon will come to the Yongsan area with precious stones in its mouth."

The dragon seems to be Yoon and the precious stones are supposed to new order created by Yoon.

Yoon Suk-yeol and his wife went to London on September 18 to attend the funeral ceremony of late Queen Elizabeth II. He is suspected to have not gone to the funeral chapel because Cheon-gong told him that there was evil spirit in the funeral chapel.

We see now that Yoon Suk-yeol makes important decisions which are likely to be suggested (or ordered) by shaman Cheon-gong.

So, we may say that Yoon's decisions are beyond the usual rational boundary of reasoning.

Coming back to the root cause of the Itaewon disaster, those who should be responsible for the tragedy should admit their responsibility and ask for pardon of the surviving families and friends and to Korean population. But they have not done so.

A recent poll (das-boe-ie-da 238) shows who are responsible for the 10.29 disaster.

- President, Yoon Suk-yeol: 65.0%
- Minister of Interior and Public Safety, Lee Sang-min: 74.3%

- Mayor of Seoul City, O Se-hoon : 71.5%
- Mayor of Yongsan District , Park Hee-yong: 82.4%

However, they have behaved and are behaving in irresponsible manner.



First, the Minister of Interior and Public Safety, Lee Sang-min said this on October 30, the day following the disaster.

Image: The Itaewon alleyway during the week-long national mourning, 31 October 2022 (Licensed under CC BY 4.0)

“Even if we deployed more police forces, we would not be able to save the young victims.”

This sounds as if the minister knew in advance what would happen.

Second, as pointed out above, the four key decision makers were absent from posts during the fatal moment.: Park Hee-young, mayor of Yongsan District; Ryu Min-jin, the person in charge of the 112 call center; Yoon Hee-gun, the National Police chief and Kim Gwang-ho, Seoul Metropolitan Police chief

Third, the authorities are blaming only those who are not in the position of giving orders; they are not decision makers.

Several of them are indicted for their “negligence” in their duties. But, in reality, they did their best to save the lives.

These individuals are crucified to hide the wrong doings of their superiors. In Korea, these immoral and illegal actions of the superiors are called the process of “tail cutting” designed to sacrifice the persons of lower rank in order to save the person of higher rank who has the responsibility of wrong doings.

This shows how hard the responsible people are trying to hide the truth, which enforces the possibility of pre-planned wrong doings.

Fourth, two persons died. One was a key employee of Seoul city involved in the management of public safety. The other was employee (known as Jeong) of the Yongsan Police station who was involved in the management of reports.

They were reported to have killed themselves. But, few believe that they killed themselves.

Unfortunately, in Korea, under the government of pro-Japan conservative government, it is a common knowledge that people at the low level of the decision making process are often forced to kill themselves to protect their superiors. The surviving families cannot protest due to fearful threat by the authorities of power.

Thus, those who should be responsible for the tragedy do everything to hide something important which might have something to do with the tragedy.

Now, what bothers Koreans and the world is some of the troubling statements of the Shaman in connection with the Itaewon tragedy, Cheon-gong. The following are some of these statements:

“The Itaewon disaster is good for Korea.”

“The greater the number of the victims, the better will be for the global reputation of Korea.”

“In order that the sacrifice be worthwhile, the number of the victims should be great.”

“The Itaewon disaster is nobody’s fault.”

So, the shaman’s statements have two messages. One is the idea that the disaster is good for Korea. The other is that nobody’s fault.

The shaman advised also the president family and other high ranking officials of Yoon government to use the Itaewon tragedy for international diplomacy.

All these sound utter nonsense, but there are some people who seem to take this nonsense seriously.

Now, if we relate the shaman’s statement and Yoon’s habit of doing what the shaman says, we have to come to a troubling conclusion that the death of 158 young souls could have something to do with the Yoon-shaman collusive relations.

To be sure, there is no evidence that Cheon-gong is involved in the disaster.

But, many South Koreans suspect that there is relation between the tragedy and the shaman-Yoon relationship.

Witnesses of the tragedy said the ambulance vehicles took away first the dead bodies leaving behind the wounded to die. Why?

One thing obvious is that it is just impossible to find out the real cause of the tragedy. What happened on the alley of Itaewon was how the children died; it was not why they had to die so horribly. We already know how, but we do not know why.

It is hoped that the ongoing parliamentary probe of the tragedy should invite Cheon-gong at

all costs to clarify the intention behind his statements related to the Itaewon disaster.

It is hoped also that the coming parliamentary probe will be bold, strong and persistent enough to resist aggressive obstruction by the president and his party, the People Power Party (PPP).

The very belligerent and irrational behaviours of the president and the PPP show strongly that they cannot reveal the true cause of the tragedy which seems to have something to do with the collusion between the president's family and their spiritual leader, Cheon-gong.

Impact of the 10.29 disaster (Itaewon Disaster)

There will be the external impact and the internal impact. The external impact will be the worsening reputation of South Korea as the safest place in the world.



Candlelight Action vigil-protest for Itaewon disaster, 5 November 2022 (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)

Under the 5-year government of Moon Jae-in government of the Democratic Party of Korea, the reputation of South Korea was very high due to successful anti-COVID 19 policy, the adoption of new economic growth policy based on more equal income distribution, productive foreign relations and, above all, three-year peace on the Korean peninsula owing to the North-South peace-process.

But, Yoon Suk-yeol has pulled the reputation of South Korea down to the ground after 6-month government due to restoration of destructive neo-liberal economic policy, disastrous foreign policy and above all the sustained attempt to create the dictatorship of corrupted prosecutors.

Now, the irresponsible attitude of Yoon government concerning the 10.29 tragedy has given the coup-de-grâce to the international reputation of the country of morning calm.

The 10.29 disaster will make South Korea unsafe country and this will hurt the credibility of its government and the tourism will be hit. The damage can go even further. The tragedy may adversely affect South Korea's international political leadership and even its trade.

But, the internal impact can be even more serious. Yoon Suk-yeol is surely the worst president South Korea has ever had. His approval rate has remained around 30% since 6 months. He has the dubious reputation of receiving the lowest international approval rate after the retired UK prime minister, Liz Truss.

The principal reasons for such poor internal approval rate include his incapacity, stubbornness, uncivilized manner, zero experience in politics, violence, destructive diplomacy, the worst sort of human right violation and, above all, his ambition of implanting prosecutor dictatorship.

It is a known secret that the president's wife, Kim Gun-hee tells the president, Yoon Suk-yeol what national policies should be and that it is the shaman, Cheon-gong who tells Kim Gun-hee what to tell her husband.

The majority of South Koreans have already given up any hope for Yoon's presidential leadership and begun massive candle-light demonstration. On October 19, no less than 400,000 people hit the street and shouted "Down Yoon Suk-yeol!" and "To prison Kim Gun-hee!"

The parliamentary probe into the Itaewon disaster is going on. But, I am afraid that it will not be able to find out the real reason of the tragedy, because the government will use every possible means to hide the truth behind the tragedy. It is possible that the real reason of the tragedy is something which cannot be revealed.

In such situation, the Candle-Light movement will increase in volume and intensity leading inevitably the end of Yoon Suk-yeol government.

And, South Koreans may have to see once again the sad scene where president leave the presidential residence and even move, along with his wife, toward the institutions of free means and free boarding.

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