

South Korea President Park Cracks Down on Left-leaning Party over Alleged “Rebellion Conspiracy”

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SEOUL/SUWON, Aug. 28 (Yonhap) — The state intelligence agency on Wednesday arrested three officials of a minor progressive party on rare charges of conspiracy to stage a rebellion, prosecutors said.

The arrests came just hours after the National Intelligence Service (NIS) agents raided the homes and offices of Rep. Lee Seok-ki of the Unified Progressive Party (UPP) and nine key party members.

The NIS put the three UPP officials, including the party's vice-chairman Hong Soon-seok, under an emergency arrest, prosecutors said.

“(The UPP officials) are charged with conspiracy to commit a rebellion and violating the National Security Law,” said Choi Tae-won, a senior prosecutor of the Suwon District Prosecutors’ Office.

The criminal law bans any activity that “prepares, conspires, propagandizes or instigates a rebellion against the state.”

The NIS, however, did not seek an arrest warrant for Rep. Lee, prosecutors said. Lee’s detention requires parliamentary consent as lawmakers in South Korea are immune from arrest while the National Assembly is in session.

The agency is expected to seek arrest warrants for the three on Thursday to further detain them for questioning, they added.

In South Korea, investigative agencies must seek a detention warrant within 48 hours to detain a suspect or they must immediately release the suspect.

“The NIS has long prepared an internal investigation into the case,” Choi said, declining to further comment on the detailed charges as the investigation is ongoing.

The UPP members allegedly had a plan to blow up infrastructure in the country, including communication networks, a district court official said, quoting court-issued warrants for the three officials.

“They are facing multiple charges, such as plotting to blow up national infrastructure, forming an organization that threatens national security, praising North Korea and conspiracy to stage a rebellion,” the Suwon District Court official said.

Both the prosecution office and the NIS declined to comment on the charges.

The last instance of a person indicted for violating the law dates back to the 1980s.

"We have not seen any case recently in which the investigative agency indicted someone on charges of conspiracy to commit a rebellion," a legal expert said.

"It is likely that (the NIS) has secured concrete evidence that can prove the charges," the expert added.

The UPP, meanwhile, criticized the NIS' move, saying that the spy agency is abusing its political power instead of apologizing for allegedly meddling in last year's presidential election.



"As the truth behind the rigged election has emerged, (the presidential office) Cheong Wa Dae, faced with an unprecedented crisis, and the NIS, on the verge of collapse, are carrying out an anti-communist campaign of the Yushin era in the 21st century," Lee Jung-hee, the chief of the UPP, said in a press conference in front of Rep. Lee's office.

The Yushin era refers to the period in the 1970s when President Park Geun-hye's late father and former President Park Chung-hee ruled the country with an iron fist.

Ruling Saenuri Party spokesman Rep. Yoo Il-ho called for a strict investigation into the allegations, saying they cause "fear beyond shock."

Rep. Bae Jae-jeung, a spokeswoman of the main opposition Democratic Party, meanwhile, voiced concern over the raid, saying it will be watched closely.

Senior presidential press secretary Lee Jung-hyun told reporters he learned of the raid on the news.

"If true, (the allegations are) truly astonishing," he said. "I haven't yet heard of the president's reaction but given the seriousness of the issue, she is likely to have been briefed on it."

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