

South Korea's Defunct President Park Impedes Impeachment Verdict, Refuses Cooperation with Corruption Probe

By [Zoom in Korea](#)

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It has been two months since the South Korean National Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favor of impeaching Park Geun-hye for her involvement in the corruption scandal with her confidante Choi Soon-sil, and South Korean citizens are growing concerned about the Constitutional Court, which is deliberating whether to uphold or dismiss the impeachment motion. To add to the uncertainty surrounding the impeachment trial, the special prosecutor charged with investigating the corruption scandal has yet to obtain access to the evidence it needs to prosecute Park.

The Constitutional Court faces delays as Park's legal team continues to request additional witnesses for examination. This week, Park's lawyers pressured the Constitutional Court to consider taking on 17 more witnesses. The Court ended up scheduling eight witnesses to take the stand in the next few weeks, so it is highly unlikely that it will reach a verdict before March, as was widely expected. Members of the National Assembly's impeachment committee have accused Park's representatives of requesting an endless list of witnesses as a tactic to delay the court's decision. They were also critical of the Constitutional Court for its inability to push the trial process along.



On February 8, lawmakers of the opposition parties demanded the Constitutional Court reach its final verdict before March 13, when the Presiding Justice of the Constitutional Court Lee Jung-mi is scheduled to retire. Lee instructed representatives of Park Geun-hye and the National Assembly's impeachment committee to submit their closing arguments by February 23. If the Constitutional Court allows the trial to move forward as scheduled without further delay, there is a chance that the final verdict will be announced before March 13. If the trial is delayed beyond March 13, however, only seven active judges (of the usual nine) will remain to make the final verdict. The previous Chief Justice Park Han-chul retired after completing his term last month.

As the courtroom drama drags on, the South Korean people are gearing up to put pressure on the Constitutional Court to make a swift decision. On February 10, the Emergency Task Force to Remove the Park Geun-hye Administration and other civil society groups called for one million people to take to the streets again for the 15th candlelight action on Saturday, February 11. The task force is aiming to pressure the court to rule in favor of impeachment and put an end to the Park administration's abomination before the end of February. They will also march to the Blue House to demand the resignation of acting President Hwang Kyo-ahn, who served as the prime minister under Park Geun-hye.

Time Running Out for Special Prosecutor



Earlier in the week, the independent special prosecutor charged with investigating the “Choi Soon-sil/Park Geun-hye gate” scandal was scheduled to interrogate Park Geun-hye about her involvement with Choi Soon-sil in the corruption scandal. The team had agreed with Park’s lawyers to arrange for Park to be questioned on February 9.

At the last minute, however, Park Geun-hye’s legal counsel abruptly called off the interview. Park’s legal team accused the prosecution of violating a prior agreement by releasing the date of the president’s interview to the public. The prosecution team, however, denied the allegation. Time is running out with fewer than 20 days remaining in the special prosecutor’s investigation mandate. And the prosecution side has yet to obtain enough evidence to prove Park’s direct involvement in [corrupt dealings with private corporations](#), such as Samsung. The Blue House has also refused to cooperate. Last week, the presidential office prevented members of the special prosecution team from carrying out a search and seizure at the Blue House and cited concerns around security of classified military information.

The special prosecution team could be granted an extension for its investigation, but it is highly unlikely, as it requires the approval of the acting president Hwang Kyo-ahn. On February 10, National Assembly lawmakers asked Hwang whether he would extend the special prosecution team’s mandate should it fail to complete its investigation before the deadline at the end of February. Hwang responded,

“There are still 20 days remaining in the investigation period. What is important is to conduct the investigation for that duration... it is not appropriate to talk about extending the special prosecution mandate... the special prosecution team must do its best.”

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