

South Korea Politics & Policy

South Korea issues arrest warrant for impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol

Unprecedented move against incumbent leader marks latest blow in spiralling political crisis



Yoon Suk Yeol is facing a criminal investigation on insurrection charges over his attempt to impose martial law in the country earlier this month © Jung Yeon-je/AFP via Getty Images

Song Jung-a in Seoul 4 HOURS AGO

A South Korean court has approved an arrest warrant for President Yoon Suk Yeol, who was impeached by parliament earlier this month over his failed attempt to impose martial law in the east Asian country.

The move on Tuesday marked the first time in [South Korea](#) that an arrest warrant has been issued against an incumbent president.

The Seoul Western District Court also issued a search warrant for Yoon's residence, following a request from the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO), which is investigating the president for treason and abuse of power.

The warrants came after [Yoon](#) ignored the agency's repeated summons for questioning, and marked the latest blow in an escalating political crisis that has raised concerns about the health of democracy in Asia's fourth-largest economy.

Last week, opposition parties [impeached acting president Han Duck-soo](#) after he refused to appoint three justices to fill vacancies on the Constitutional Court, which is deliberating whether to remove Yoon from office.

It remains unclear whether the agency will carry out the warrants, which are valid until Monday. The CIO said it planned to execute the warrants, but the president's

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security service blocked a prior police attempt to raid his office following [Yoon's impeachment](#) on December 14 under a law that bans searches of locations with state secrets without approval.

The presidential security service said on Tuesday that security measures would be taken according to the legal process.

Yoon, who has denied wrongdoing, is facing a criminal investigation into possible insurrection after he allegedly dispatched troops to the national assembly in an attempt to prevent lawmakers from rejecting his martial law decree.

His lawyers said they planned to file an injunction to the Constitutional Court to dispute the warrants' validity and prevent his arrest, claiming that the martial law decree did not constitute insurrection.

Under South Korea's constitution, the president has the privilege of immunity from criminal prosecution, but it does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason.

"There is no reason [for Yoon] to avoid an investigation. [He has] no intention to avoid or delay it," one of the lawyers, Yoon Kap-keun, told reporters. "He will cope with it fairly and legally if legal procedures are followed no matter who the investigating institutions are."

Prosecutors on Tuesday also indicted Lee Jin-woo, chief of the capital defence command, and Yeo In-hyung, head of the defence counter-intelligence command, for their alleged roles in Yoon's attempted power grab. Former defence minister Kim Yong-hyun was indicted last week.

Kweon Seong-dong, the acting leader of Yoon's ruling People Power party, said on Tuesday that detaining a sitting president was inappropriate, according to state-run Yonhap News.

The main opposition Democratic party called for Yoon to be detained immediately.

Yoon has been suspended from his duties until the Constitutional Court makes a decision on whether to dismiss or reinstate him. Finance minister Choi Sang-mok took up presidential powers on an interim basis following Han's impeachment.

The court is supposed to reach a verdict by June, although that deadline limit is not binding. If Yoon is removed from office, a presidential election must be held within 60 days.

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