

South Korean president wants coast guard disbanded

By Hyung-jin Kim
The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's president has pledged to disband the coast guard amid mounting criticism of its failure to save hundreds of passengers trapped in a sinking ferry. Critics said President Park Geun-hye was trying to shift attention from her mishandling of one of South Korea's deadliest disasters in decades.

The country's coast guard is a nonmilitary agency and does not patrol the maritime frontier with North Korea, which is done by the navy. Still, a move to abolish the independent coast guard in a peninsula country surprised many.

The agency has faced withering criticism that it acted slowly and unprofessionally in botched rescue and search efforts. The April 16 sinking of the *Sewol* left more than 300 people dead or missing.

Park's first televised address to the nation since the sinking began with a deep bow and ended with her tearfully reading the names of passengers and crew who died trying to save others. With her approval ratings plummeting ahead of the mayoral and governor elections, the speech sought to acknowledge widespread anger over government failures as well as chart a path forward.

Most of the victims were students from a high school near Seoul who were travelling to the southern tourist island of Jeju.

"We failed to rescue students who we could have saved," Park said. "The ultimate responsibility for not properly dealing with this incident is mine."

But Park also held the coast guard responsible for the high death toll. She called the coast guard's rescue work a failure and said swifter, more aggressive action in the initial stages of the sinking could have saved more lives.

Park said she would push for legislation aimed at transferring the coast guard's responsibilities to the National Police Agency and a new government safety agency that she plans to establish. The new agency would also take over maritime traffic controlling responsibilities, currently held by the Ocean Ministry, and safety and security responsibilities, held by the Ministry of Security and Public Administration, and would deal with both land and sea disasters, she said.

Coast guard chief Kim Suk-kyoon said his agency would humbly accept Park's decision and intensify efforts to recover all missing ferry passengers. More than six weeks after the sinking, 286 bodies have been



COAST GUARD CRITICISM. South Korean coast guard officers try to rescue passengers from the *Sewol* ferry as it sinks in the waters off the southern coast near Jindo, south of Seoul, South Korea, in this April 16, 2014 file photo. South Korea's president has pledged to disband the coast guard amid mounting criticism of its failure to save hundreds of passengers trapped in the sinking ferry. (AP Photo/Yonhap, File)

retrieved but 18 others are missing. Some 172 people, including 22 of the ship's 29 crew members, survived.

The immediate backlash from Park's rivals could signal a rough path for the proposals, which require parliamentary approval.

"Disbanding the coast guard is an extremely sensational, stunning announcement, and it gives an impression that Park is passing all the responsibility to the coast guard," said Park Kwang-on, a spokesman for the main opposition party.

The coast guard has been blamed for a series of missteps during and after the sinking. Questions have been raised about why its boats came late to the scene and why rescuers didn't enter the sinking ship to rescue passengers trapped inside. The coast guard has said that the ship was listing too far for officers to enter when they arrived.

A senior coast guard officer dealing with relatives of missing passengers stepped down after he was found to have had close ties with the ferry's de facto owners. Another officer was arrested for allegedly leaking confidential information that the authorities would investigate regulators. The coast guard has also faced criticism for repeatedly correcting the number of survivors and people aboard the ship.

The coast guard, founded in 1953, at the close of the Korean War, only became an independent organization in 1996. It was previously part of the country's police agency. One big coast guard responsibility is dealing with Chinese fishermen illegally operating in South Korean waters. The new agency would take over those duties.

Eleven out of the 13 coast guard chiefs named since 1996 have been land-based police officers, not coast guard officers; the top 14 current coast guard officers have no experience working as captains for

1,000-ton-class ships or bigger vessels; and about 25 percent of its top 67 officers have had less than one month of experience working on patrol ships, the coast guard said, confirming reports published by lawmakers.

Despite the criticism, Kim Woo-Sook, a professor at Mokpo National Maritime University, said the coast guard shouldn't solely take the biggest responsibility for the disaster. He said allegations that the ferry set off with far more cargo than it could safely carry and that crew members abandoned passengers in need should also be equally considered as main factors.

Prosecutors last month indicted 15 crew members tasked with navigating the ship, four on homicide charges.

The ship's captain, Lee Joon-seok, initially told passengers to stay in their cabins and took about half an hour to issue an evacuation order, but it's not known if his message was ever conveyed to passengers.

The head of the ferry operator, Chonghaejin Marine Co. Ltd., and four other company employees have also been arrested. Authorities suspect improper stowage and overloading of cargo may have contributed to the disaster.

During her speech, Park also said she would push for separate legislation aimed at rooting out collusive and corrupt ties between bureaucrats and civilian sectors, something seen by many as a reason for the sinking. Park said retired officials have a tradition of working at the Korea Shipping Association, which oversees safety issues of ships.

The disaster has prompted soul-searching about the nation's neglect of safety as it built Asia's fourth-biggest economy from the ashes of the 1950-1953 Korean War.

Associated Press writers Foster Klug and Jung-yoon Choi in Seoul contributed to this report.



FLIGHT DELAY. Feng Yi, one of two giant pandas from China, sits in a cage upon arrival at the cargo terminal of Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang, Malaysia. The pandas, named Fu Wa and Feng Yi, arrived in Malaysia to mark 40 years of diplomatic ties between the two countries. The pandas are on loan to Malaysia for ten years. (AP Photo/Vincent Thian)

Two pandas arrive in Malaysia from China after delay

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Two giant pandas have arrived in Malaysia from China after a one-month delay due to the missing Malaysian jetliner.

Male Fu Wa and female Feng Yi are on a 10-year loan from China to commemorate the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Upon their arrival on a special plane, they were taken to a specially built complex at the national zoo, where they'll be quarantined for a month before receiving visitors.

The scheduled arrival of the pandas was postponed out of respect for relatives of passengers aboard Malaysia Airlines Flight 370. The search is ongoing for the plane, which vanished while flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8 with 239 people on board, mostly Chinese.

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	1			4	5		7	6
	2				3			5
						2		
		4		6			8	
	7						9	
	8			3		7		
		6						
7			3					5
5	9		1	8				4

Difficulty level: Medium

#14576

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last week's puzzle

Puzzle #74693 (Easy)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

9	6	2	8	7	3	4	5	1
5	4	1	6	2	9	7	3	8
8	3	7	1	5	4	2	9	6
3	5	9	2	8	7	6	1	4
2	7	4	3	1	6	5	8	9
6	1	8	4	9	5	3	2	7
1	8	5	7	4	2	9	6	3
4	2	6	9	3	1	8	7	5
7	9	3	5	6	8	1	4	2

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