

# South Korean ferry that sank in 2014 lifted from sea

By Kim Tong-Hyung  
The Associated Press

**S**EOUL, South Korea — Nearly three years after it capsized and sank into the violent seas off South Korea's southwestern coast, workers slowly pulled up the 6,800-ton ferry *Sewol* from the water in an emotional moment for a country that continues to search for closure to one of its deadliest disasters ever.

More than 300 people — most of whom were students on a high school trip — died when the *Sewol* sank on April 16, 2014, touching off an outpouring of national grief and soul searching about long-ignored public safety and regulatory failures. The public outrage over what was seen as a botched rescue job by the government contributed to the recent ouster of Park Geun-hye as president.

After hours of tests and preparations, workers on two barges began the salvaging operation, rolling up 66 cables connected to a frame of metal beams divers spent months putting beneath the ferry, which had been lying on its left side in about 130 feet of water.

Within half a day, the right side of the *Sewol* rose above the surface, allowing workers to climb on it and further fasten the ferry to the barges, according to the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries.

Shanghai Salvage Co. loaded the ferry onto a semi-submersible, heavy-lift vessel to carry it to a mainland port. The loading process, including emptying the ferry of water and fuel, took days.

The bodies of 295 passengers were recovered after the sinking on April 16, 2014, but nine are still missing. Relatives, some of whom were watching from a



fishing boat just outside the operation area, hope those remains are found inside the ferry.

Once the ferry reaches a port nearly 55 miles away in the city of Mokpo, workers will begin clearing the mud and debris and search for the remains of the missing victims. An investigation committee will also be formed to search for clues that could further explain the cause of the sinking, which has been blamed on overloaded cargo, improper storage, and other negligence.

The ferry's captain survived and is serving a life sentence after a court found him guilty of committing homicide through "willful negligence" because he fled the ship without issuing an evacuation order.

Park was forced to defend herself against accusations that she was out of contact for several hours on the day of the sinking. The allegations were included in an impeachment bill lawmakers passed

against Park in December, amid broader corruption suspicions.

Park was formally removed from office by the Constitutional Court earlier in March. She is now under criminal investi-

**EMOTIONAL MOMENT.** Relatives of the missing victims watch the sunken ferry *Sewol* sitting on a semi-submersible transport vessel while attending religious services on a boat, in waters off Jindo, South Korea. Nearly three years after it capsized and sank into the violent seas off South Korea's southwestern coast, workers slowly pulled up the 6,800-ton ferry from the water in an emotional moment for a country that continues to search for closure to one of its deadliest disasters ever. (Photo/South Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries via AP)

gation over suspicion that she conspired with a confidante to extort money and favors from companies and allow the friend to secretly interfere with state affairs.

South Korea in 2015 agreed to an 85.1 billion won (\$76 million) deal with a consortium led by China's state-run Shanghai Salvage Co. to raise the *Sewol*.

The government initially planned to salvage the ferry by the end of last year, but the process was delayed due to strong currents and unfavorable weather conditions.

## Steady fall in suicides offers glimmer of hope in Japan

By Ken Moritsugu  
and Mari Yamaguchi  
The Associated Press

**T**OKYO — Fewer Japanese are taking their own lives, a positive sign in a country with one of the world's highest suicide rates.

The Health Ministry said 21,897 people committed suicide in 2016, down from more than 30,000 in 2011 and the lowest number since 1994. Of those, 15,121 were male and 6,776 were female. It was the seventh straight year that the number of suicides had declined.

Experts say it's difficult to pinpoint a reason for the decline, attributing it to a

combination of factors. The government has made a determined effort to tackle the issue, starting with national legislation in 2006. Consumer loan laws have been revised to try to keep people from taking on too much debt, while awareness campaigns have helped bring the issue into the public eye.

"Now we can talk about suicides," said Yasuyuki Shimuzu, founder of Lifelink, a nonprofit that lobbies for suicide-prevention measures. "I believe the change in environment has made it easier for the needy to seek help."

Before the good news, however, came

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