

North Korea ICBM Launch

North Korea launched a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), Hwasong-14 on July 4th. Launched in Banghyon airfield in the North Pyeongan province, it reached an altitude of more than 2,802km (1,731miles) and flew 933km (578miles)¹ before landing in the sea between North Korea and Japan. The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) announced that the ICBM launch was successful and the US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson later confirmed the North Korean claim.

Seoul's Response to the DPRK ICBM

Shortly after the launch, President Moon convened a National Security Council meeting and strongly condemned the act. Moon emphasized the need to demonstrate the allies' resolve by ordering a joint military exercise targeting North Korea's nuclear and missile facilities.²

On Wednesday, the South Korean military released images of core strategic weapons that could be mobilized for a 'decapitation strike' against North Korea. It also released images of ballistic missile Hyunmoo-2C, air-launched cruise missile Taurus, Slam-ER, and US strategic bomber B-1B.³

At the same time, the Ministry of Reunification announced that no considerable changes would be made to the two-track policy of putting pressure and applying sanctions while keeping the door open to conversation.⁴

The ROK-US Summit

Observers in Seoul were relieved to see that the first Moon-Trump summit did not have the drama of the first meeting between the last conservative-progressive administrations in Presidents George W. Bush and Roh Moo-hyun. The assessment, however, was mixed. Some observers noted that South Korea was mentioned in the joint statement as playing the "leading role" in Korean Peninsula affairs.⁵ Others argued that this was nothing out of the ordinary given that the US has traditionally supported this position.⁶ The Democratic Party hailed the summit as a success⁷ while the opposition parties portrayed the first Moon-Trump summit as "a summit with no particular complications but without much

progress."⁸ Some experts questioned what the "right circumstances" were to begin dialogues with North Korea in the future.⁹ Trump's repeated reference to the renegotiation of KORUS FTA was seen as a price tag for the achievement on security matters.¹⁰

People's Party election misconduct scandal

The People's Party (PP) Member Lee Yoo-mi was apprehended last Monday for leaking false information about Moon Joon-young, the son of President Moon Jae-in. Lee was accused of tampering 'evidence' and spreading false rumors about Moon and his son.

Lee testified initially that the misinformation campaign was ordered by the PP leadership but later claimed that she is solely responsible; however, new evidence consisting of text messages between Lee and former PP supreme council member (Lee Joon-seo) have renewed growing speculation about the PP leadership's role in this scandal.¹¹

According to a survey conducted by Gallup Korea during June 27-29, the PP's approval rate is at 5%, which is 2%p lower than the previous week. Other polls also showed PP garnering less support in the Southern Jeolla region in comparison to the conservative Liberty Korea Party (LKP).¹² There is a growing possibility that the PP could potentially split or even dissolve altogether. But it is unclear how the 38 PP seats would be reconstituted in the National Assembly.

Nuclear Plant Shutdown

Moon's announcement to shutdown South Korea's nuclear power plants ignited a discussion over South Korea's energy security. Nuclear energy accounts for approximately 30% of South Korea's power generation. The Moon administration has committed to bring this percentage down to 18% by 2030 and increase reliance on natural gas (up to 37%).¹³

As part of this plan, the administration has temporarily stopped the construction of Shingori Nos. 5 and 6. The project is 28.8% complete and the government has poured in approximately KRW 1.6

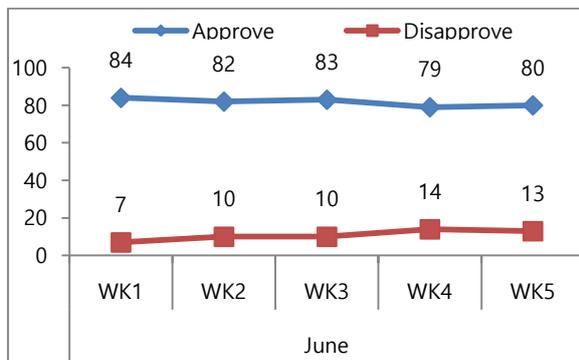
trillion.¹⁴ There were debates over planning as there is no comparable design in scale and juxtaposed construction of nuclear power generation facilities in the world.¹⁵ Moon pledged to review the construction while the project is under temporary suspension. Public discussion committee will be formed in three months consisting of 10 members, to determine what to do next.¹⁶ This committee excludes stakeholders in the construction and all energy sector personnel. While the public is encouraged to participate, there are concerns as to whether expert voice can be effectively considered in the committee.¹⁷

More fundamentally, concerns are raised over weakening energy security. Less nuclear power generation means more dependence on imports and renewables.¹⁸ South Korea has very limited capacity in renewable energy supply and has no supply networks with neighboring countries to deal with contingencies.¹⁹ The decision has made the energy market less predictable and raised the suspicion of a possible rate hike on the future electricity bill.²⁰

Special Prosecution

The special prosecution recommended stiff penalties for former presidential chief advisor Kim Gi-chun (7 years) and former Minister Cho Yun-sun (6 years). The reasoning hinged on the nature of the crime, which they claimed violated freedom of speech and deepened societal division.²¹

President Moon's Approval Rating (%)²²



Party Approval Rating (%)

	WK 4 ²³	WK 5 ²⁴
Together Democratic Party	50	48
Liberty Korea Party	9	9
People's Party	7	5
Righteous Party	7	9
Justice Party	7	7
Don't know/refused	20	23

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24 Gallup Korea. Date: June 27-29; sample size 1,005; margin of error: ± 3.1 at the 95% confidence level.

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