

South Korea's impeached president resists arrest over martial law bid

AFP- Impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol remained defiantly inside his residence resisting arrest for a third day on Thursday, after vowing to "fight" authorities seeking to question him over his failed martial law bid.

The embattled leader issued the bungled declaration on December 3 that led to his impeachment and has left him facing arrest, imprisonment or, at worst, the death penalty.

Members of his security team have blocked attempted police raids of his presidential residence in a dramatic stand-off, and tensions rose outside the compound on Thursday as rival protest camps clashed.

"We had to withdraw. Most participants were hit and assaulted multiple times by those waving national flags," said Bae Hoon, a 46-year-old protesting for Yoon's removal.

Some of Yoon's right-wing supporters earlier shouted "protect the president!" and laid on the ground to block police dispersing them for fear they will move on Yoon before an arrest warrant's January 6 deadline.

"We expect the CIO (Corruption Investigation Office) will enter through the main gate... so our colleagues are lying down to prevent them," pro-Yoon protester Rhee Kang-san, 35, told AFP.

Yoon has gone to ground but remained unrepentant as the crisis has rolled on, issuing a defiant message to his base as the warrant's Monday deadline neared.

"The Republic of Korea is currently in danger due to internal

and external forces threatening its sovereignty,” he said in a statement to protesters confirmed by his lawyer.

“I vow to fight alongside you to the very end to protect this nation,” he added, saying he was watching their protest on a YouTube live stream.

Yoon’s lawyer confirmed to AFP that the impeached leader remained inside the presidential compound.

As night fell on Thursday, pro-Yoon protesters waved glowsticks and chanted slogans against his impeachment, while some rival supporters waved flags calling for his execution.

– Blocked raids –

Opposition lawmakers were quick to condemn Yoon’s message as inflammatory, with Democratic Party spokesperson Jo Seoung-lae calling him “delusional” and accusing him of trying to incite clashes.

Yoon’s legal team has filed for an injunction to a constitutional court to block the warrant, calling the arrest order “an unlawful and invalid act”, and on Thursday submitted an objection to the Seoul court that ordered it.

CIO chief Oh Dong-woon warned that anyone trying to block authorities from arresting Yoon could themselves face prosecution.

Along with the summons, a Seoul court issued a search warrant for his official residence and other locations, a CIO official told AFP.

The presidential security service’s official stance in response to the warrants has been to follow procedure.

They have cited two articles in South Korea’s Criminal Procedure Act that prohibit seizure from locations where official secrets are stored, without consent of the person in

charge.

It remains unclear how many guards are stationed with him but they have blocked searches of his office and residence.

The Seoul court has issued a warrant permitting investigators to search the presidential residence, creating an exception to those laws.

South Korean officials have previously failed to execute similar arrest warrants for lawmakers – in 2000 and 2004 – due to party members and supporters blocking police for the seven-day period the warrants were valid.

– Refused questioning –

Yoon's martial law order, which he said was aimed at eliminating "anti-state elements", only lasted a few hours.

Armed troops stormed the national assembly building, scaling fences, smashing windows and landing by helicopter, but Yoon was quickly forced to make a U-turn after lawmakers rushed to parliament to vote it down.

He has since refused summonses for questioning three times and doubled down on claims the opposition was in league with South Korea's communist enemies.

Supporters have raced to Seoul to support him in the wake of his refusal, spewing vitriol at police and waving anti-impeachment placards.

A constitutional court will rule whether to uphold his impeachment.

The turmoil deepened late last week when his replacement, Han Duck-soo, was also impeached by parliament for failing to sign bills for investigations into his predecessor.

Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok has been installed as acting

president and pledged to do all he can to end the political upheaval.

AFP