S. Korea’s Yoon ignored cabinet opposition to martial law: prosecutors

AFP – South Korea’s suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol ignored the objections of key cabinet ministers before his failed martial law bid last month, according to a prosecutors’ report seen by AFP on Sunday.
Yoon plunged the country into political chaos on December 3 with the bungled martial law declaration and has since holed up in his residence, surrounded by hundreds of security officers resisting arrest efforts.

The full 83-page prosecution report to indict former defence minister Kim Yong-hyun said the country’s then prime minister, foreign minister and finance minister all expressed reservations the night of the decision.

They made their concerns clear about the economic and diplomatic fallout in a cabinet meeting, which Yoon called before his short-lived power grab.

“The economy would face severe difficulties, and I fear a decline in international credibility,” then prime minister Han Duck-soo told Yoon, according to the report seen by AFP.

Han became acting president after Yoon was stripped of his duties, but was also impeached by opposition MPs who argued he refused demands to complete Yoon’s impeachment process and to bring him to justice.

Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul reportedly said martial law would have “diplomatic repercussions but also destroy the achievements South Korea has built over the past 70 years”.

Acting president Choi Sang-mok, also finance minister, argued the decision would have “devastating effects on the economy

and the country’s credibility”.

Despite the objections, Yoon said “there is no turning back”, claiming the opposition – which won a landslide in April’s parliamentary election – would lead the country to collapse.

“Neither the economy nor diplomacy will function,” he reportedly said.

An earlier summary of the report provided to the media last month revealed Yoon authorised the military to fire their weapons to enter parliament during the failed bid.

The suspended president’s lawyer Yoon Kab-keun dismissed the prosecutors’ report.

He told AFP the indictment report alone does not constitute an insurrection and “it doesn’t align legally, and there’s no evidence either”.

Yoon remains under investigation on charges of insurrection and faces arrest, prison or, at worst, the death penalty.

The Constitutional Court slated January 14 for the start of Yoon’s impeachment trial, which if he does not attend would continue in his absence.

The court may take the prosecutors’ report on Kim – one of the first indicted over the martial law bid – into consideration.

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