

# South Korea police raid spy agency over drone flight into North

AFP:: Investigators raided South Korea's spy agency Tuesday as they searched for the source of a drone incursion into North Korea, an incident that threatens to blight efforts to mend relations with Pyongyang.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has sought to repair ties with his nation's nuclear-armed neighbour, vowing to stop the drones that buzzed across the border under his predecessor.

Pyongyang says it shot down a surveillance drone near the industrial hub of Kaesong in January, accusing Seoul of dispatching the aircraft to glean intelligence on "important targets".

South Korea initially denied any official involvement, with Lee saying such an act would be tantamount to "firing a shot into the North".

But a joint military-police task force said Tuesday it was investigating three active-duty soldiers and one spy agency staffer in an effort to "thoroughly establish the truth".

Investigators raided 18 locations of interest, including the Defense Intelligence Command and the National Intelligence Service.

The North Korean military downed a drone carrying "surveillance equipment" in early January, according to a statement published by the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

Photos showed the wreckage of a winged craft scattered across the ground next to a collection of grey and blue components

that allegedly included cameras.

The drone had stored footage of “important targets” including border areas, a military spokesman said in the statement.

South Korea’s disgraced ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol was accused of using unmanned drones to scatter propaganda leaflets over North Korea in 2024.

Lee has vowed to mend ties with North Korea by stamping out such provocations, and has even suggested a rare apology may be warranted.

“I feel I should apologise, but I hesitate to say it out loud,” he said in December.

“I worry that if I do, it could be used as fodder for ideological battles or accusations of being pro-North,” he added.

Any government involvement in the January drone incursion would run counter to those efforts.

South Korea’s Unification Minister Chung Dong-young has previously suggested the incursion may have involved government officials still loyal to former hardline leader Yoon.

Three civilians have already been charged for their alleged role in the drone scandal.

One of them has publicly claimed responsibility, saying he acted to detect radiation levels from North Korea’s Pyongsan uranium processing facility.

– Provocation and propaganda –

Ex-president Yoon is currently standing trial on charges he illegally sent drones into North Korea to help create the pretext for declaring martial law in late 2024.

Prosecutors have accused Yoon of instructing Seoul's military to fly drones over Pyongyang and distribute anti-North leaflets in an attempt to provoke a response.

They said Yoon and others "conspired to create conditions" that would allow him to tighten his grip on power by declaring martial law.

Yoon's disastrous attempt to overturn civilian rule would ultimately fail.

The 65-year-old was impeached and ousted from office in April last year.

He will be sentenced on charges of insurrection next week.

In retaliation for propaganda dumps, North Korea in 2024 sent scores of trash-filled balloons to scatter waste across the South.

AFP