

Seoul mayor found dead after '#MeToo allegations'

AFP | Seoul

Seoul's outspoken mayor Park Won-soon, long seen as a potential South Korean presidential candidate, was found dead, police said Friday. He was 64.

A former Seoul City employee filed a police complaint -- allegedly involving sexual harassment -- against him on Wednesday.

Park's body was found on a mountain in northern Seoul, police said, hours after hundreds of officers started searching for him.

If Park does prove to have killed himself he would be the highest-profile South Korean politician to do so since former president Roh Moo-hyun, who jumped off a cliff in 2009 after being questioned over corruption allegations involving family members.

Park's daughter reported him missing on Thursday afternoon, saying her father had been unreachable for several hours, police said.

He left a message that sounded like "last words" and his phone had been turned off, she told police.

A heavyweight figure in the ruling centre-left Democratic party, Park ran South Korea's sprawling capital -- home to almost a fifth of the national population -- for nearly a decade.

He has consistently been spoken of as a potential candidate in the race to succeed President Moon Jae-in, and did not deny ambitions on that front when asked by AFP earlier this year.

Park had a similar background



Seoul mayor Park Won-soon (R) attends a meeting

to Moon as a student activist in the days of South Korea's military dictatorship and later a human rights lawyer.

He was kicked out of Seoul National University in 1975, barely a month after entering the prestigious school, for taking part in a rally against then president Park Chung-hee, and jailed for four months.

Jailhouse to courthouse

But he described his time in prison as a happy and productive period that allowed him to formulate his life goals.

After completing his studies, Park went into law and defended many political activists in the 1980s and 1990s.

He helped launch the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, an influential NGO pushing to reform the conglomerates that dominate South Korean business.

Park also founded the Beautiful Foundation -- a philanthropic

group that promotes volunteerism and community service -- in the hopes of giving people the ability "to feel wonderful and beautiful" by donating to its cause.

It grew into one of the largest non-profit organisations in South Korea and launched the Beautiful Stores, a chain of charity shops modelled after Britain's Oxfam shops.

Besppectacled and soft-featured, Park was considered a political novice when he first entered the Seoul mayoral race as an independent candidate in 2011 but he defeated Na Kyung-won, the most prominent female lawmaker for the then ruling conservative party.

He subsequently joined the Democratic party and made a name for himself as a three-term mayor of the South Korean capital -- his final victory coming in a 2018 landslide when he took more than 50 percent of the vote.



Park Won-soon was seen as a potential presidential hopeful for the liberals in the 2022 presidential elections

During his campaign, Park -- known for his hardworking and down-to-earth character -- pledged to create a cleaner city that ensured gender equality, and to bring about peace between North and South Korea.

On his official Twitter account, Park introduced himself as a "Social Designer", saying: "These days, I... dream of creating Seoul that puts the people first. Please join me in this dream."

But he also earned a reputation as a workaholic boss, with reports saying a handful of civil servants at the Seoul city government had committed suicide due to work-related stress under him.

Earlier this week he courted controversy by being one of several senior Democratic party politicians to attend the funeral of the mother of Ahn Hee-jung, a former provincial governor convicted of sexual offences last year.

News in brief

China landslides leave at least 14 dead or missing

Heavy rains and landslides in China have left at least 14 people dead or missing over the past day, burying houses and causing scenic areas to temporarily shut. Six people have been unreachable since a landslide in

southwestern Guizhou province hit three villages on Wednesday, local authorities said. At least 156 people have been relocated, and six who were trapped had to be rescued after the incident.



A wooden sculpture of US first lady Melania Trump was torched near her hometown of Sevnica, Slovenia, on the night of July Fourth,

US first lady Melania Trump statue set on fire in Slovenia

as Americans celebrated US Independence Day, said the artist who commissioned the sculpture. Brad Downey, a Berlin-based American artist, said he had the life-sized blackened, disfigured sculpture removed as soon as police informed him on July 5th of the incident.



The frozen body of an Indonesian man has been found aboard a detained Chinese fishing vessel, authorities said, adding that they suspected foul play in the crew member's death.

Indonesian police said they intercepted two boats in the Malacca Strait this week after receiving a tip off that a crew member had died aboard one of the vessels.

Hundreds of Rohingya refugees on a flood-prone island in the Bay of Bengal will not be allowed to leave unless they agree to return home, Bangladesh authorities said. The 306 Muslim Rohingya from Myanmar were put on Bhashan Char island in April after being taken off two boats trying to traffic them to Malaysia.

Indonesian found in freezer on Chinese fishing vessel

Bangladesh says Rohingya refugees can't leave island

A French retiree could face the death penalty in Indonesia on charges that he molested over 300 children and beat those who refused to have sex with him, authorities



said. Police said they nabbed Francois Camille Abello, 65, last month at a hotel in Indonesia's capital Jakarta, where they found two underaged girls in his room.

Turkish verdict paving way for Hagia Sophia mosque expected today: officials



Tourists visit Istanbul's famous Hagia Sophia

Reuters | Ankara

A Turkish court is likely to announce today that the 1934 conversion of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia into a museum was unlawful, two Turkish officials said, paving the way for its restoration as a mosque despite international concerns.

President Tayyip Erdogan has proposed restoring the mosque status of the sixth-century UNESCO World Heritage Site, which was central to both the Christian Byzantine and Muslim Ottoman empires and is now one of the most visited monuments in Turkey.

The prospect of such a move has raised alarm among U.S.,

Russian and Greek officials and Christian church leaders ahead of a verdict by Turkey's top administrative court, the Council of State, which held a hearing last Thursday.

At issue is the legality of a decision taken in 1934, a decade after the creation of the modern secular Turkish republic under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, to turn the ancient building into a museum.

"We expect the decision to be an annulment (and) the verdict to come out on Friday," a senior Turkish official told Reuters.

An official from Erdogan's ruling AK Party, which has Islamist roots, also said the decision "in favour of an annul-

ment" was expected on Friday.

Pro-government columnist Abdulkadir Selvi wrote in the Hurriyet newspaper that the court had already made the annulment ruling and would publish it on Friday.

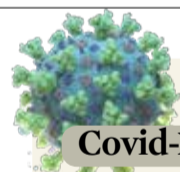
"This nation has been waiting for 86 years. The court lifted the chain of bans on Hagia Sophia," he wrote.

The association that brought the case said Hagia Sophia was the property of Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II, who in 1453 captured the city, then known as Constantinople, and turned the already 900-year-old Byzantine church into a mosque.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual head of some 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide and based in Istanbul, said a conversion would disappoint Christians and "fracture" East and West. The head of Russia's Orthodox Church said it would threaten Christianity.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Greece have also urged Turkey to maintain the museum status.

But Turkish groups have long campaigned for Hagia Sophia's conversion, saying it would better reflect Turkey's status as an overwhelmingly Muslim country.



Global Covid-19 Cases:

12,277,179

Deaths

554,501

Recovered:

7,143,586

New cases

+121,150

New deaths

+3,304

Middle East

Country	Total cases	new cases	Total deaths	New Deaths	Total recovered	Active cases	Serious, Critical	Tot cases/1m pop
Egypt	78,304		3,564		22,241	52,499	41	765
Saudi Arabia	223,327	+3,183	2,100	+41	161,096	60,131	2,225	6,413
UAE	53,577	+532	328	+1	43,570	9,679	1	5,416
Kuwait	52,840	+833	382	+3	42,686	9,772	150	12,370
Oman	51,725	+1,518	236	+3	33,021	18,468	129	10,126
Qatar	102,110	+557	142	+4	97,272	4,696	145	36,366

Figures as of closing

Global

Countries worst affected

Country	Total cases	New deaths	Total Deaths
1 USA	3,184,939	+419	135,281
2 Brazil	1,727,279	+300	68,355
3 India	794,196	+478	21,622
4 Russia	707,301	+176	10,843
5 Peru	312,911		11,133
6 Chile	306,216	+109	6,682
7 Spain	300,136	+5	28,401
8 UK	287,621	+85	44,602
9 Mexico	275,003	+782	32,796
10 Iran	250,458	+221	12,305
11 Italy	242,363	+12	34,926
12 Pakistan	240,848	+61	4,983
13 South Africa	224,665		3,602
14 Saudi Arabia	223,327	+41	2,100