

Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*The Political Crisis in
South Korea: Context and
Contours*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker:
Sandip Kumar Mishra

29 Jan 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker: Prof. Sandip Kumar Mishra, Professor, Korean Studies, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Chair: Prof. Alka Acharya, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi; Chairperson and Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Venue: Zoom Webinar

- The seminar focused on the political crisis in South Korea. The speaker examined the series of events that led to the declaration of martial law in Korea by the now-impeached and detained President Yoon Suk-yeol. The crisis has revealed structural weaknesses in South Korean politics, and the role of digital media in shaping political discourse.
- Prof. Mishra detailed the political turmoil that began on 3 December 2024, when President Yoon declared emergency martial law, deploying troops at key institutions. Due to resistance from various state bodies, the National Assembly successfully ensured its revocation, leading to its withdrawal within hours. An impeachment motion was later passed, and the Constitutional Court is now reviewing the case.
- Prof. Mishra highlighted deep-rooted political divisions in South Korea, particularly between conservative and progressive factions. These divisions, influenced by regional, generational, and gender-based factors, contribute to recurring political instability.
- The role of university and high school alumni associations in governance was also discussed. These networks impact political appointments and reinforce existing power structures, thus affecting democratic processes.
- According to the speaker, algorithm-driven content consumption has intensified ideological divisions, facilitating misinformation and conspiracy theories. Claims of foreign interference in the 2024 elections illustrate how digital platforms shape political discourse and decision-making.

- The chair emphasised concerns over institutional fragility in South Korea, questioning whether democratic principles have been fully internalised and highlighting the need for stronger safeguards.
- The discussion extended beyond South Korea, drawing parallels with other democracies facing challenges due to digital media influence, polarisation, and weakened institutions. The need for long-term reforms was underscored as essential for sustaining democratic governance.

Disclaimer: This is a summary produced for purposes of dissemination and for generating wider discussion. All views expressed here should be understood to be those of the speakers and individual participants, and not necessarily of the Institute of Chinese Studies. Since this is a summary, it cannot be used for citation without confirming with the speaker(s).