

From: SMART Archive  
Sent: 4/16/2014 3:44:37 AM  
To: svcSMARTHBTSP06  
Subject: Seoul Daily for Wednesday, April 16, 2014

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NON-RESPONSIVE PORTIONS  
REDACTED

MRN: 14 MDA 3065  
Date/DTG: Apr 16, 2014 / 160744Z APR 14  
From: Bassett, Leslie A  
E.O.: 13526  
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, MASS, KS, ENRG, TRGY, ECON, EFIN, ELAB, SENV, CH  
Captions: SENSITIVE  
Subject: Seoul Daily for Wednesday, April 16, 2014

**(SBU) Passenger Ferry Sinks; 7th Fleet to Assist Search and Recovery:** In response to an official request from the Commander of the ROK Fleet for U.S. Navy assistance, 7th Fleet has dispatched the USS Bonhomme Richard (BHR) Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), which consists of 3 amphibious vessels, to assist in the search and recovery operations of the sunken ferry Sewol. The BHR will arrive on-scene at around 1700 KST and will work under the supervision of the ROK commander at the scene. The Sewol, a passenger ship carrying 477 people, including 325 high school students, sank off South Korea's southern coast at around 0858 KST on April 16, leaving at least two people dead. *Yonhap* reported at 1530 local time that 290 people were missing, correcting an earlier report that 107 were missing. The accident prompted a massive rescue operation involving the ROK Navy, Coast Guard, and military, and included 22 vessels, a Lynx helicopter, 10 army helicopters, and a C-130 military transport aircraft carrying life boats. CONS confirmed no Amcits listed on Sewol manifest.

NR

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Lahiguera, Senior  
Reviewer



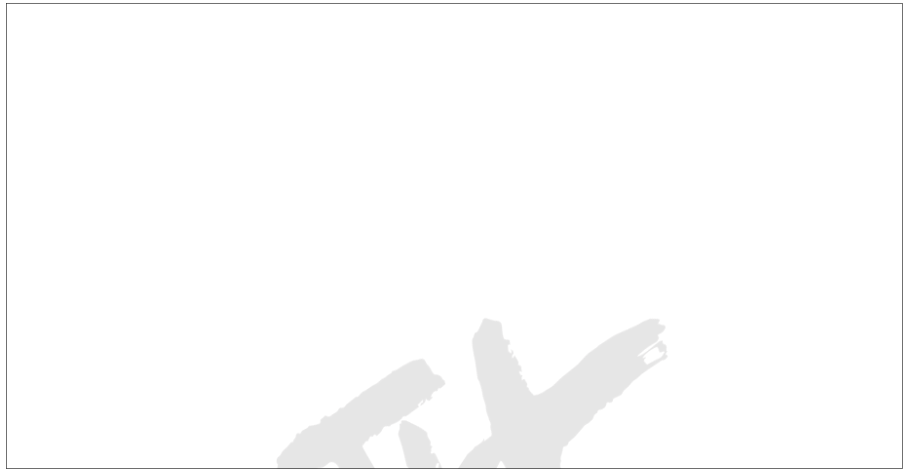
NR

**Classified By:** Name: Leslie A. Bassett, Title: Deputy Chief of Mission  
Office: EXEC  
Agency: STATE  
**Reason:** 1.4 (b), (d)  
**Declassify On:** 2024/04/16  
**Drafted By:** SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
**Approved By:** SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
**Released By:** SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
**Info:**



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**From:** SMART Archive  
**Sent:** 4/17/2014 3:52:14 AM  
**To:** svcSMARTHBTSP08  
**Subject:** Seoul Daily for Thursday, April 17, 2014

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NON-RESPONSIVE  
PORTIONS REDACTED

**MRN:** 14 MDA 3097  
**Date/DTG:** Apr 17, 2014 / 170752Z APR 14  
**From:** Bassett, Leslie A  
**E.O.:** 13526  
**TAGS:** ECON, ETRD, PGOV, PREL, SENV, KS, KN, PHUM, ENRG, SHLH, MASS, IR  
**Captions:** SENSITIVE  
**Subject:** Seoul Daily for Thursday, April 17, 2014



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**(SBU) U.S. Continues to Assist in Sewol Ferry Sinking:** The USS Bonhomme Richard (BHR) amphibious ship continued search operations in the "Sewol" ship sinking area with helicopters on April 17 while strong currents prevented the ROK from conducting operations the night before. Diving operations resumed on April 17, and the ROK Navy is planning on requesting PACOM assistance for rescue and salvage capability. Japan also has a salvage unit and rescue ship on standby should the ROKG request assistance. Yonhap reported as of 11:30 that there are 9 casualties and 287 missing.

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**Page Denied**

**Classified By:** Name: Leslie A. Bassett, Title: Deputy Chief of Mission  
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**Reason:** 1.4 (b), (d)  
**Declassify On:** 2024/04/17  
**Drafted By:** SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
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국가보안  
한국탐사저널리즘센터

**From:** SMART Archive  
**Sent:** 4/18/2014 4:57:03 AM  
**To:** svcSMARTHBTSP05  
**Subject:** Park's Approval High as Opposition Stumbles; Ferry Sinking Tragedy a Challenge?

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1.4(B),B1

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**MRN:** 14 SEOUL 403  
**Date/DTG:** Apr 18, 2014 / 180857Z APR 14  
**From:** AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
**Action:** WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE  
**E.O.:** 13526  
**TAGS:** PGOV, PREL, KS, KN, JA  
**Captions:** SENSITIVE  
**Subject:** Park's Approval High as Opposition Stumbles; Ferry Sinking Tragedy a Challenge?

1. (C) Summary: President Park Geun-hye's approval rate has risen steadily in recent weeks and has moved comfortably over 60 percent. Park has capitalized well on strong public approval of her foreign policies, and avoided blame for domestic controversies. Moreover, a dearth of compelling leaders in the opposition provides the president with significant political space. The April 17 sinking of a ferry that carried 475 people, including 325 high school students, and the public's view that the government bungled its response could present a challenge to Park. 28 people have been confirmed dead with 268 people missing, most of whom are feared dead. Families and relatives of the victims lashed out at the prime minister by pouring water on him and they expressed strong anger when Park met with them. Despite her ability to avoid damage from past controversies, the ferry accident and the government response could influence Park's standing as she came into office promising to prioritize public safety. End summary.



Park's Approval Soaring High

3. (SBU) President Park Geun-hye's support has increased steadily in recent weeks as polling by *Chosun Ilbo* -- likely biased in favor of the president -- showed her approval rate reached 69 percent, 5 percent higher than in February. Gallup and RealMeter polls also showed Park's approval rate at 60 percent in recent weeks, placing

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B1  
1.4(B)



her at the same level as former Presidents Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung at this point in their terms, the highest among all leaders following democratization. *Chosun* in reporting its poll said Park maintained solid support from those over the age of 50 and said that younger people increasingly supported her diplomatic and national security policies.

4. (C) Park also benefits greatly from continued disarray among her political opposition. The New Politics Alliance for Democracy (NPAD), formed in March via a merger between the Democratic Party (DP) and popular independent lawmaker Ahn Cheol-soo, rode initial public interest to support rates that approached those of President Park's ruling New Frontier Party (NFP or Saenuri). The failure of Rep. Ahn Cheol-soo to deliver on his sweeping promise to bring about "new politics" however has resulted in public support for NPAD dropping rapidly. [REDACTED]

B1  
1.4(B)

5. (C) The basis for strong public approval of President Park is not only a solid foundation of older voters, but also her ability to avoid skillfully damage from controversies. [REDACTED]

B1  
1.4(B)

#### Ferry Disaster Shocks Nation

6. (C) The sinking April 16 of the passenger ferry "Sewol" southwest of Korea's coast and the government's response have drawn strong criticism. The ship carried 475 people, including 325 high school students and 15 teachers, when it sank. As of late-afternoon April 18, officials confirmed 28 people dead with 179 rescued. 268 people remain missing, and most commentators believe the missing are all dead. With most passengers high school students, the ferry tragedy struck strongly the victims' families and the public. Moreover, while rescue operations included hundreds of boats and divers' search efforts, challenges from low visibility, cold temperatures, strong waves, and fast sea currents made rescue operations difficult and raised frustration levels.

#### Park Visitsirate Family Members

7. (SBU) President Park on April 17 visited the site of the ferry sinking and met with relatives of the victims. She urged rescuers to give full effort and promised that authorities were still working on the assumption that they would find people alive. The meeting turned tense as family members interrupted Park with angry shouts. One woman asked furiously what Park was doing while people were dying. The president took questions from families and tried to answer them while pledging repeatedly that the government would do its best to rescue all of the missing. The president's visit came a day after Prime Minister Chung Hong-won was hit with a water bottle and sprayed with water while meeting the families of the victims.

8. (C) Faced with an angry crowd, Park [REDACTED] told government officials to ensure that the families were provided accurate information about rescue operations. She said that government officials in charge of the rescue operations must resign if promises to the families were broken. Park also pledged to sternly punish those responsible for the accident.

B1  
1.4(B)

#### Families Angered by Government Response

9. (SBU) Following the displays of anger during visits by the president and the prime minister to the gymnasium where relatives have gathered, a self-appointed spokesperson for the relatives on April 18, during a television broadcast, accused the government of indifference and deception. The representative said the government had lied regarding the number of divers, ships, and aircraft involved in search and rescue operations as family

members who had visited the rescue site reported seeing only a dozen ships and helicopters. The spokesperson asked if lying was the reality of today's South Korea. Media outlets also reported that the government said April 17 that it was pumping oxygen into the sinking ferry but had to admit later that this statement was false, after families questioned how this was possible when divers were unable to gain access to the ship.

10. (SBU) The accusations regarding deceptive official statements on rescue operations followed criticism that in the hours after the ferry began to sink, the government was unable to confirm the number of people aboard the ship. Moreover, the government provided false hope to the victims' families by reporting a large of people rescued before revising significantly the number downward. The Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures first announced April 17 that 368 people had been rescued, but revised the statement shortly afterwards in admitting that only 164 had been saved at that time. The Gyeonggi Provincial Office of Education also sparked anger by announcing that the high students had all been rescued only to admit later that this had been false.

11. (C) The impact of the ferry accident on President Park's standing will bear watching as she came into office touting her strong intention to protect the safety of citizens. While Park's promises focused primarily on protecting people from crimes such as rape and students from school bullying, she established a control tower for people's security in order to improve government responses to incidents such as the ferry disaster and avoid confusing the public with false information.

#### Ferry Captain in the Spotlight

12. (SBU) Public criticism of the ferry's captain has been particularly strong. Multiple reports indicate that either the captain or his crew ordered passengers to not move for up to 40 minutes after the ferry ran into trouble. In addition, the captain is reported to have told crew to evacuate within 10 minutes of the incident while informing the passengers to remain in the cabins. Survivors also told reporters that the captain was among the first to abandon the ship by jumping into a Coast Guard vessel.

#### Demands for Stronger Measures to Protect Safety

13. (SBU) The ferry accident has already resulted in calls for the government to introduce stricter measures to protect public safety. An online news channel on April 17 accused the government of lax enforcement of safety standards and publicized maritime ministry documents that showed it allocated only a few minutes per ship for safety inspections. The news organization's website crashed as its report attracted attention in social media. Even conservative newspaper *JoongAng Ilbo* in an April 18 editorial called for wide-ranging measures to protect public safety. The editorial said the reaction of the ferry's crew suggested a lack of understanding on how to cope with emergencies and what to do to protect safety. The newspaper demanded that the government introduce measures to upgrade safety systems and procedures, including for food and health issues. The *Korea Herald* also called for stronger government measures in asking when South Korea would decide that safety should be prioritized over money.

Signature: Kim

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**Classified By:** Name: Edward K.H. Dong, Title: Political Minister Counselor  
**Reason:** 1.4 (b), (d)  
**Declassify On:** 2024/04/18  
**Drafted By:** SEOUL:Hines, Thomas R  
**Approved By:** Seoul:Dong, Edward K  
**Released By:** SEOUL:Hines, Thomas R  
**Info:** Hines, Gregory E ROUTINE ; Cooper, Robert A ROUTINE ; Flaherty, Thomas A ROUTINE ;  
Hantman, Adam J ROUTINE ; Havens, Katharyn E ROUTINE ; Kim, Barbra E ROUTINE ;  
King, Robert R ROUTINE ; Lines, Bridget M ROUTINE ; Muehlke, David V ROUTINE ;  
Oba, Mintaro ROUTINE ; O'Neill, Aloysius M ROUTINE ; Paik, Connie Y ROUTINE ;  
Rapson, Robert G ROUTINE ; Rebholz, T. Katharine ROUTINE ; Rosner, Zachary A ROUTINE ;  
Shulman, Michael A

ROUTINE ; Son, MinSuh ROUTINE ; Steele, Andrew J ROUTINE ; Urbom, Scott E ROUTINE ;  
Vanzego, Lakeia R ROUTINE

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From: SMART Archive  
Sent: 4/21/2014 4:37:14 AM  
To: svcSMARTHBTSP0P1  
Subject: Seoul Daily for April 21, 2014

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PORTIONS REDACTED

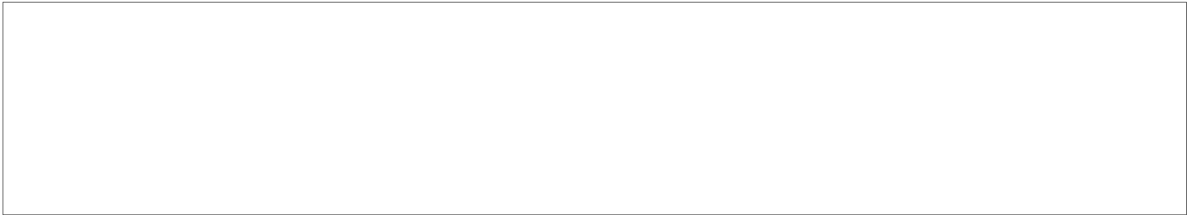
MRN: 14 MDA 3161  
Date/DTG: Apr 21, 2014 / 210837Z APR 14  
From: Bassett, Leslie A  
E.O.: 13526  
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, MASS, ECON, ETRD, ELTN, EWWT, KS, KN, ELAB  
Captions: SENSITIVE  
Subject: Seoul Daily for April 21, 2014

**(SBU) Sewol Disaster Update on U.S. Assistance:** The USS Bonhomme Richard (BHR) is still on the scene of the Sewol sinking site as of April 21, and is awaiting ROK Navy instructions for release. Two U.S. Navy salvage engineers arrived on-scene on April 19, but the ROK is reluctant to move to the salvage phase because of pressure from the families of victims to continue with rescue operations. Two British salvage engineers are scheduled to arrive Seoul at 0900 on April 22 to offer assistance and will join the US Navy salvage team. The USNS Safeguard has been pulled back, we understand, after ROK Navy indicated there would be no mission for it.

**(SBU) Ferry Tragedy: Impact on President Park, Interest in U.S. FEMA and Counseling Practices:** The death toll from the *Sewol* sinking increased April 21 to 64 with no survivors found since immediately after the ferry began to sink on April 16. 238 people remain missing. Search operations continue as divers are using guidelines to focus efforts on areas in which students are expected to be found. Relatives and friends of the victims continue to criticize the government's response to the disaster, and police blocked a group intending to march from Jindo, near the sinking, to Seoul to complain to President Park. POL heard today that New Frontier Party Rep. Hwang Jin-ha and a group of lawmakers, who will be in Washington next week for U.S.-ROK-Japan inter-parliamentary events, are requesting a meeting with FEMA in order to discuss disaster response procedures. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF), which is providing counseling to survivors and family members of missing passengers through its Healthy Family Support Center and counseling centers for juveniles, asked us for lessons developed from responses to hurricanes or 9/11 on best practices for providing counseling and assistance to survivors and families.

NR

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Lahiguera, Senior  
Reviewer



NR

Drafted By: SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
Approved By: SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
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ROUTINE

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국가안전  
한국탐사저널리즘센터

From: SMART Archive  
Sent: 4/22/2014 3:54:33 AM  
To: svcSMARTHBTSP08  
Subject: Seoul Daily for Tuesday, April 22, 2014

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PORTIONS REDACTED

MRN: 14 MDA 3213  
Date/DTG: Apr 22, 2014 / 220754Z APR 14  
From: Bassett, Leslie A  
E.O.: 13526  
TAGS: ECON, ETRD, EWWT, SENV, SOCI, PGOV, PREL, KS, RS  
Captions: SENSITIVE  
Subject: Seoul Daily for Tuesday, April 22, 2014

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**(U) FSS Investigating Ferry Owners' Financials, Ferry Upgrades to Extend Lifespan Also Questioned:** As the number of bodies recovered from the Sewol disaster surpassed 100, the Financial Supervisory Service (FSS) is investigating the financial activities of the owners of the ferry that sank last week. FSS announced April 22 that it is investigating the foreign exchange transactions of Yoo Byung-eun, former chief of Cheonghaejin Marine Corporation. FSS is "probing Cheonghaejin, its affiliates and the owner and his family over possible illegal foreign exchange transactions and the illegal purchase of overseas assets," an FSS official told the press April 22. In related news, the FSS revealed audit information that showed Chonghaejin Marine had made modifications to the Sewol in 2013 to extend its lifespan for an additional seven years, according to media reports. Chonghaejin Marine reportedly borrowed 10 billion won (\$9.5 million) from the state-run Korea Development Bank to upgrade the vessel, which had already been in service in Japan for 18 years (1994-2012). The Korean Register of Shipping approved Chonghaejin Marine's upgrade and extension plans in February 2014, media reported. Local shipping experts have told ROK media that "the average lifespan of an ordinary ship is 15 years."

**(SBU) Sewol Disaster Update; U.S. Assistance:** As of 1540 on April 22, *Yonhap* is reporting 108 deaths and 194 people missing from the sinking of the ferry *Sewol*. After close consultation and with concurrence from the ROK Chief of Naval Operations, the USFK Commander has given the order to release the USS Bonhomme Richard (BHR) from search and rescue operations on April 22. The completion of BHR's mission comes after ROK commanders determined that current resources were sufficient to carry out future search and rescue operations utilizing Korean ships and aircrafts. Attached is the U.S. Navy press release on the departure of the BHR, which will be simultaneously released with the ROK MND. In a change from yesterday, today the USNS Safeguard (salvage ship) continues her transit to Korea, with confirmation from both the ROK Navy and MND that the ROKG is still requesting and anticipating USNS Safeguard's participation in current efforts. The two

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U.S. Navy salvage engineers remain on-scene and are working with the ROK Navy salvage squadron, proving subject matter expertise. Two British salvage engineers are also expected to join the efforts.

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Drafted By: SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
Approved By: SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
Released By: SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
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Attachments: 04-22-14 BHR Press Release.pdf

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**From:** SMART Archive  
**Sent:** 4/24/2014 4:15:11 AM  
**To:** svcSMARTHBTSP05  
**Subject:** Seoul Daily for Thursday, April 24, 2014

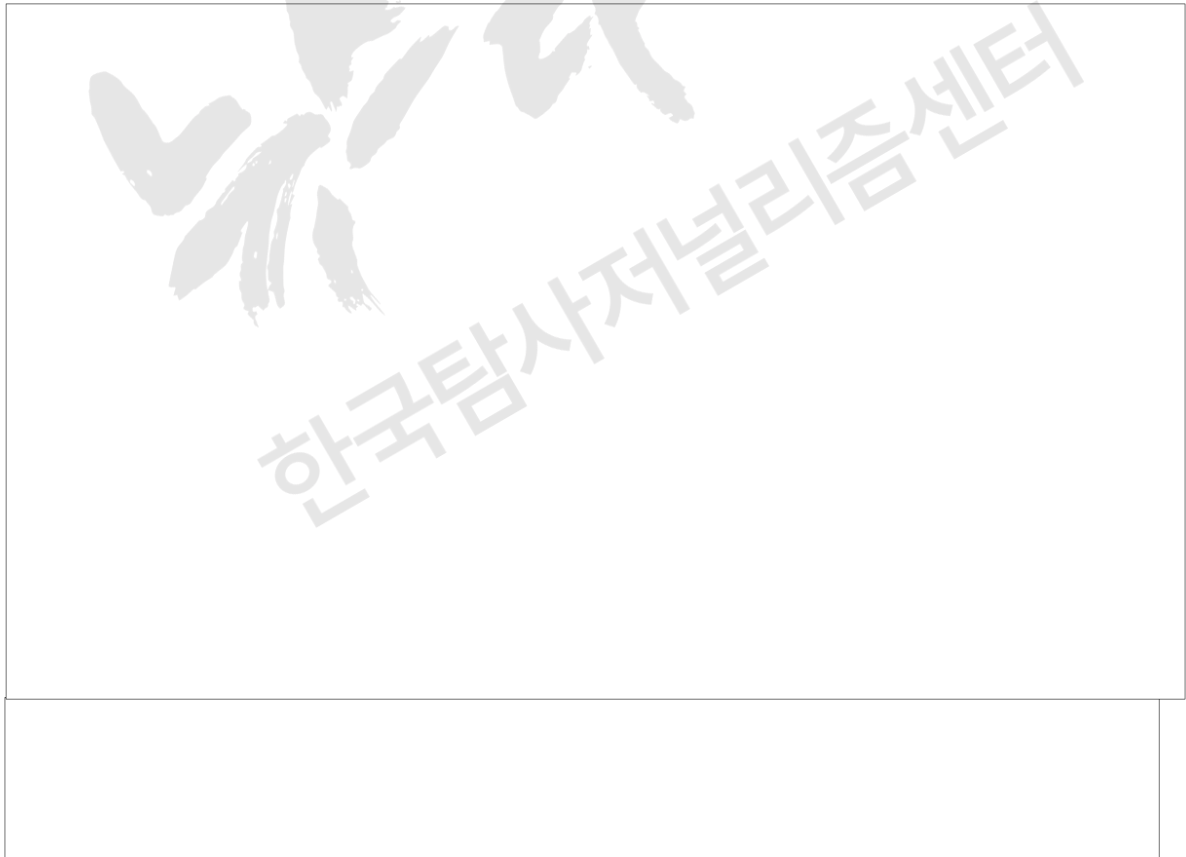
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**MRN:** 14 MDA 3281  
**Date/DTG:** Apr 24, 2014 / 240815Z APR 14  
**From:** Bassett, Leslie A  
**E.O.:** 13526  
**TAGS:** PGOV, PREL, ECON, ETRD, KS, KN, IZ, EFIN  
**Captions:** SENSITIVE  
**Subject:** Seoul Daily for Thursday, April 24, 2014

Things are looking good for tomorrow!



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(SBU) Criticism Continues on Government Response to Ferry Disaster: Pressure continues built on the

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Lahiguera, Senior  
Reviewer

government for its handling of the Sewol ferry sinking. In a surprising move for a party that has displayed extraordinary message discipline, 20 first-term and second-term New Frontier Party (NFP) lawmakers called for a resignation of all Cabinet members, including Prime Minister Chung Hong-won. Politicians at all levels are very focused on nationwide local elections which will be held June 4 and the ferry disaster is increasingly worrying the ruling party. The group of lawmakers criticized the government's response to the Sewol disaster, which led to 171 deaths with 131 still missing, and said the need to calm public sentiment before elections makes it necessary for the Cabinet to resign. The calls came two days after senior NFP Rep. Rhee In-jae called for a broad cabinet reshuffle. Media has speculated that a dilemma for President Park Geun-hye could be whether to replace the Ministers of Oceans and Fisheries and of Security and Public Administration, the two ministries most closely associated with the accident, since they have been in their positions for less two months. Nonetheless, increasing pressure on the president and the government appears likely to result in a Cabinet reshuffle. The *Korea Times* suggested April 24, and our contacts have speculated as well, that Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Hyun Oh-seok may soon lose his position, not due to the ferry tragedy, rather for the earlier personal financial data leaks controversy.

- At the same, some conservative NFP lawmakers have placed themselves at the center of criticism for their actions following the sinking. NFP Supreme Council member Rep. Han Ki-ho received criticism for saying that leftist groups with links to North Korea would capitalize on the ferry disaster to undermine the government. Possibly more damaging to the NFP, its leading candidate for Seoul mayor Rep. Chung Mong-joon, also a hopeful for president in 2017, found himself in a very difficult position after his 19-year-old son criticized families of the victims for expressing frustration to President Park and the government. Rep. Chung's son also said that the families' actions demonstrated that South Korea is an uncivilized nation. Following missteps by the government and leading politicians, the *Chosun Ilbo* on April 24 cited an unnamed NFP official as saying there is increasing concern in the NFP that the party may lose elections for Seoul mayor, Incheon mayor, and Gyeonggi Province Governor. These contests will be the most watched in the elections.
- The main opposition New Politics Alliance for Democracy (NPAD) has so far generally fared better as its members have mostly been more restrained in the aftermath of the disaster. The most damaging incident for the opposition was a NPAD candidate for a local position who left the party after it was discovered that he gave the impression he was a relative of a victim in leading talks last week with the government. On the other hand, the NPAD on April 24 attacked the Blue House following National Security Chief Kim Jang-soo's attempt to dodge responsibility for the government response by releasing an official message saying his office is not the control tower for handling disasters. Press commented that the remark was unconvincing as Kim had reported the ferry accident to President Park Geun-hye and took follow-on measures. The NPAD highlighted that the Blue House was trying to shift blame to other government offices.

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**From:** SMART Archive  
**Sent:** 4/25/2014 3:11:34 AM  
**To:** svcSMARTHBTSP04  
**Subject:** Seoul Daily for Friday, April 25, 2014

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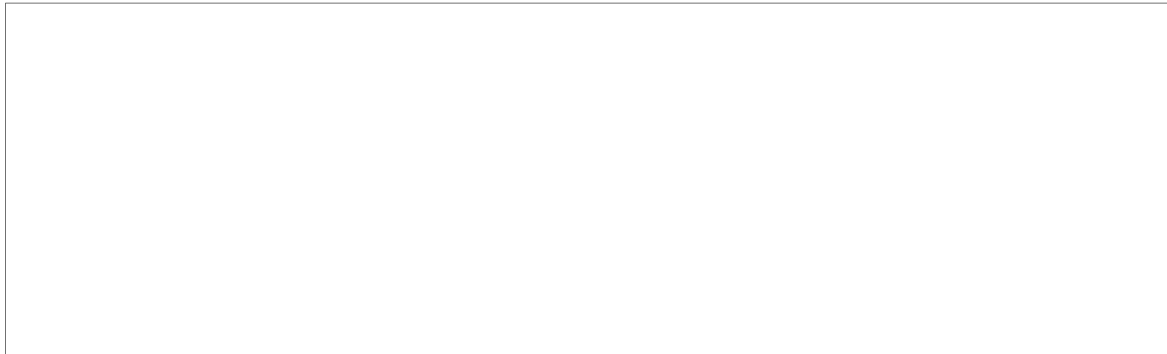
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PORTIONS REDACTED

**MRN:** 14 MDA 3321  
**Date/DTG:** Apr 25, 2014 / 250711Z APR 14  
**From:** Jassem, Daniel P (Seoul)  
**E.O.:** 13526  
**TAGS:** TBIO, SHLH, EAGR, ECON, ETRD, ENRG, EPET, PREL, PGOV, SOCI, CH, KN, KS  
**Captions:** SENSITIVE  
**Subject:** Seoul Daily for Friday, April 25, 2014



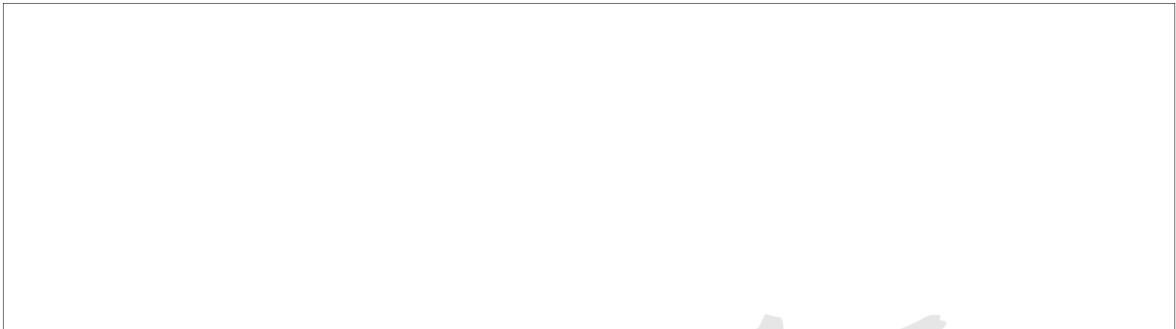
NR

**(U) Ferry Sinking Likely to Put a Dent in Q2 Consumption:** The ROK economy will likely experience a decline in the second quarter as private consumption has cooled significantly in the aftermath of the Sewol ferry sinking, market analysts asserted April 25. If trends hold, Korea's economic growth could retreat 0.2 to 0.3 percentage points in the second quarter, analysts assess. Consumer spending already slowed during Q1, largely attributed to temporary factors such as declines in refunds from year-end tax settlements and higher temperatures than usual. However, the slowdown would likely accelerate as ROK consumers have significantly cut back spending in the wake of the Sewol disaster.



NR

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Lahiguera, Senior  
Reviewer



NR

Drafted By: SEOUL:Jassem, Daniel P (Seoul)  
Approved By: SEOUL:Jassem, Daniel P (Seoul)  
Released By: SEOUL:Jassem, Daniel P (Seoul)  
Info:



NR

Dissemination Rule: Archive Copy

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SBU

국가안전  
한국탐사저널리즘센터

**From:** SMART Archive  
**Sent:** 4/28/2014 3:22:35 AM  
**To:** svcSMARTHBTSP09  
**Subject:** Seoul Daily for Monday, April 28, 2014

RELEASE IN  
PART  
B4,B1,1.4(D),NR

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NON-RESPONSIVE  
PORTIONS REDACTED

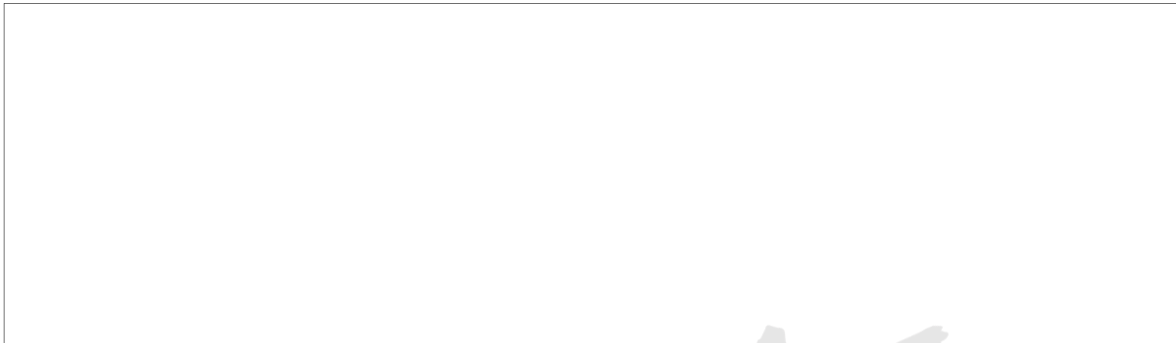
**MRN:** 14 MDA 3351  
**Date/DTG:** Apr 28, 2014 / 280723Z APR 14  
**From:** Bassett, Leslie A  
**E.O.:** 13526  
**TAGS:** PGOV, PREL, ECON, EFIN, EINV, KS, KN, PHUM, JA  
**Captions:** SENSITIVE  
**Subject:** Seoul Daily for Monday, April 28, 2014

A big thanks to all our Washington colleagues for terrific POTUS support, we really appreciate it!

NR

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Lahiguera, Senior  
Reviewer





NR

**(SBU) Park Accepts PM's Resignation; Polls Show Significant Approval Rate Drop:** President Park Geun-hye on April 27 accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Chung Hong-won, but postponed his withdrawal from office until after the Sewol ferry accident has been completely dealt with. Chung's move is viewed as an attempt to hold himself responsible for the disaster response and protect Park from further damage to her approval rate. Press continued to speculate April 28 whether Park will apologize to the public for the government's response to the sinking, and whether she will need to conduct a wider cabinet reshuffle. Chung's resignation will not significantly impact the administration's activities as the ROK presidency is holds much more power than prime minister. Some pollsters, such as Gallup and the Asan Institute, are withholding reporting recent polling numbers as there are reports that some in the public expressed opposition to moves that would "quantify the tragedy with numbers about the government."

B4

The April 16 ferry sinking came when Park was enjoying her highest approval rates since taking office in February 2013 and the disaster and the government's response appears to have caused the president's approval rate to drop by approximately 10 percent.



NR

**(C) Blue House Appreciates Positive POTUS Visit,** [redacted] told us President Park was very pleased with the Obama visit, and the ROK generally was relieved that the U.S. President was so sincere in offering condolences for the ferry accident, both in person and in the form of the Jackson Magnolia (already planted at the school attended by deceased ferry passengers) and the flag. [redacted] in press pre-briefs ROK officials balanced ongoing KORUS implementation issues with wins like samgyetang. He also agreed that the return of the seals was a highlight for many Koreans. The lengthy fact sheet was significant both in that it detailed the breadth of our cooperation, but also that its status as "joint" demonstrated unity of purpose.

B1  
1.4(D)

B1  
1.4(D)

B1  
1.4(D)



**Classified By:** Name: Leslie A. Bassett, Title: Deputy Chief of Mission  
Office: EXEC  
Agency: STATE

**Reason:** 1.4 (b), (d)

**Declassify On:** 2024/04/28

**W/O Attachment(s):** This document is CONFIDENTIAL when separated from UNCLASSIFIED attachment(s).

**Drafted By:** SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A

**Approved By:** SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A

**Released By:** SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A

**Info:**

NR

Attachments:

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국가안전  
한국탐사저널리즘센터

**From:** SMART Archive  
**Sent:** 4/30/2014 3:24:48 AM  
**To:** svcSMARTHBTSP03  
**Subject:** Seoul Daily for Wednesday, April 30, 2014

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FULL

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SBU

NON-RESPONSIVE PORTIONS  
REDACTED

**MRN:** 14 MDA 3445  
**Date/DTG:** Apr 30, 2014 / 300725Z APR 14  
**From:** Bassett, Leslie A  
**E.O.:** 13526  
**TAGS:** PGOV, PHUM, PREL, SOCI, KS, KN, MARR, ECON, EFIN, EINV, SENV, CH, JA  
**Captions:** SENSITIVE  
**Subject:** Seoul Daily for Wednesday, April 30, 2014

**(SBU) Park's Sewol Apology Criticized:** President Park Geun-hye's visit to a memorial altar and an apology she made for the Sewol ferry sinking appear to have fallen short of expectations. Park on April 29 first visited the memorial altar at Danwon High School and then made an apology for the disaster at a Cabinet meeting. Families of the victims released a statement that criticized Park for not making a public apology, characterizing her Cabinet statement as an informal apology, not an actual apology. The statement also asked whether Cabinet members were the only people who matter to President Park when there are 50 million people in South Korea. Families of the victims also reacted negatively during Park's visit to the memorial altar, screaming and swearing at the president and discarding flowers sent by Park once she left the site. According to the *Hankyoreh*, Park faltered in responding to the families' anger before saying "You're right. After this is over, there will be a cabinet meeting. At the meeting, we will eliminate all of the deep-rooted evils that have been building up all this time." After Park departed the memorial, the families got rid of flowers sent by her and senior government and ruling party officials.

**(U) Media Watchdog Highlights KCC Attempt to Control Coverage of Sewol Sinking:** A media watchdog has released an internal Korea Communications Commission (KCC) report that indicates that the regulator attempted to influence television news reports regarding the Sewol ferry sinking. The report said the KCC would adjust and control media reporting of the accident. A KCC spokesperson denied that the regulator tried to influence editorial decisions and claimed the effort was only to reporting of false rumors. The report also said the KCC planned to form a six-person team to monitor Sewol news stories on television networks and the Internet in order to react swiftly to false television reports and establish a system of cooperation.

NR

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Lahiguera, Senior  
Reviewer



NR

Drafted By: SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
Approved By: SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
Released By: SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A  
Info:



NR

NR



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국립사서지국  
한국탐사저널리즘센터

From: SMART Archive  
Sent: 5/1/2014 9:34:39 PM  
To: SMART Core  
Subject: Scen setter for Energy Secretary Moniz May 11-14 Visit to the Republic of Korea

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IN FULL

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SBU



NON-RESPONSIVE  
PORTIONS REDACTED

MRN: 14 SEOUL 836  
Date/DTG: May 02, 2014 / 010428Z MAY 14  
From: AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE  
E.O.: 13526  
TAGS: ENRG, TRGY, SENV, OVIP, ECON, PREL, PGOV, SOCI, KGHG, KNNP, KPAO, KS  
Captions: SENSITIVE  
Correction Reason: CORRECTED COPY: Error in text.  
Subject: Scen setter for Energy Secretary Moniz May 11-14 Visit to the Republic of Korea

1. (SBU) Secretary Moniz and colleagues, Embassy Seoul warmly welcomes you to the Republic of Korea (ROK) for the fifth Clean Energy Ministerial.

NR

Your visit comes at a time of deep sorrow for all Koreans due to the loss of so many young lives in the Sewol ferry sinking. Koreans are currently in no mood for light-hearted activities or celebrations and prefer subdued engagement and somber dress, which may cause the CEM to have a more somber atmosphere than usual. You should seek appropriate opportunities to express condolences to your ROK hosts.

President Park and Domestic Politics

2. (SBU) President Park was busy on the diplomatic front in her first year in office with a successful visit to Washington, a red carpet welcome in Beijing, and "sales diplomacy" visits to South and Southeast Asia. Park maintains solid approval numbers, at times rising above 60 percent, with her popularity attributed to management of foreign policy, including firm positions on North Korea and Japan and her engagement with China. In her second year in office, Park has attempted to focus on job creation and economic growth but the National Assembly remains generally deadlocked. The death toll of the April 16 Sewol ferry sinking is estimated to reach 302 and it would be appropriate to reiterate President Obama's message of condolence

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Lahiguera, Senior  
Reviewer

concerning the ferry tragedy during your visit. The accident resulted in a drop in Park's approval rating to the mid-fifties, but this is still historically strong. The political implications of the ferry sinking are evolving while important local elections will be held on June 4. The new unified opposition party, New Politics Alliance for Democracy, has struggled to find a message with which to challenge Park's New Frontier Party (Saenuri).

NR





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Your visit comes at a time of deep sorrow for all Koreans due to the loss of so many young lives in the Sewol Ferry sinking. Koreans are currently in no mood for light-hearted activities or celebrations and prefer subdued engagement and somber dress. We recommend you share your condolences for their loss often.

Signature:	Kim
<hr/>	
Drafted By:	SEOUL:Steed, Matthew M
Cleared By:	White, Heath H Hines, Thomas R McEachern, Patrick T Moore, Dewey E Kral, Alexei T Byers, Brent D Larsen, Mitchell G Bowles, Ryan E Bauman, Kirsten S Jassem, Daniel P Tarnowka, Mary E
Approved By:	Bassett, Leslie A
Released By:	SEOUL:Steed, Matthew M
Info:	ROME, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE ; MEXICO, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE ; DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE ; DEPT OF ENERGY COMMUNICATION CENTER WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE ; KOREA COLLECTIVE

ROUTINE

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국가안전  
한국탐사저널리즘센터

From: SMART Archive  
Sent: 5/12/2014 4:08:42 AM  
To: SMART Core  
Subject: Seoul ESTH Update April 2014

RELEASE IN FULL

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SBU



NON-RESPONSIVE PORTIONS  
REDACTED

MRN: 14 SEOUL 892  
Date/DTG: May 12, 2014 / 120807Z MAY 14  
From: AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE  
E.O.: 13526  
TAGS: SENV, ENRG, TSPL, SHLH, TBIO, TRGY, EWWT, KS  
Captions: SENSITIVE  
Subject: Seoul ESTH Update April 2014

1. (SBU) This cable is sensitive but unclassified and not intended for Internet distribution.

In This Issue

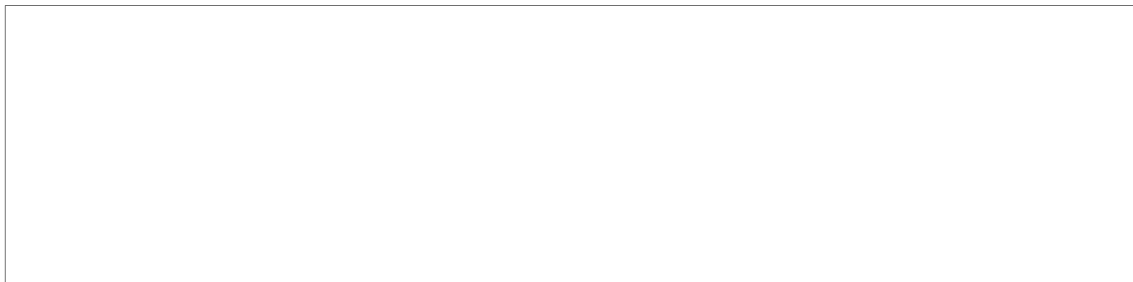


Sinking of Ferry Sewol Left More than 300 Passengers Dead or Missing



Environment and Energy

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Lahiguera, Senior  
Reviewer



NR

NR

3. (SBU) Sinking of Ferry Left More than 300 Passengers Dead or Missing

The Korean ferry Sewol sank off the country's southwest coast with 476 passengers on board on April 16, leaving more than 300 passengers, mostly high school students, dead or missing. With search and rescue operations underway, government authorities have launched investigations into the sinking. Initial media reports pointed that a combination of direct causes including the ferry's modification to increase its passenger capacity, excessively overloaded cargo, and containers and vehicles not properly tied down led the ship to lose its balance. Irresponsible captain and crew members, who have all been arrested for negligence and failure to rescue passengers trapped in their cabins, and the nation's inefficient emergency response systems, particularly its poor initial response, are blamed for the high death toll. The investigative probe is expanding to examine collusive ties between the government and industry which allegedly enabled the ship's operator, Chonghaejin Marine Company, to cut corners on safety. President Park vowed to overhaul the nation's safety system and create a government agency in charge of handling both manmade and natural disasters. (Korea Herald, April 16-30)

NR

Smart Grid test bed project in Jeju last year and plans to deploy the Smart Grid nationwide from 2015. (Yonhap News, April 17)

NR



Signature: Bassett

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Drafted By: SEOUL:Lee, Ji-yeoun; Nam, Mi-rim  
Cleared By: SEOUL/EMB/ECON:Bauman, Kirsten S  
Approved By: SEOUL/EMB/ECON:Bauman, Kirsten S

Released By: SEOUL:Balthazaar, Michele S  
Info: BANGKOK, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE ; TAIPEI, AIT ROUTINE ; TOKYO, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE ; BEIJING, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE ; SINGAPORE, AMEMBASSY ROUTINE ; HONG KONG, AMCONSUL ROUTINE ; SHENYANG, AMCONSUL ROUTINE ; VLADIVOSTOK, AMCONSUL ROUTINE ; USDOC WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE ; DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE ; DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE ; DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE ; WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE ; NOAA NMFS WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE ; NOAA NOS WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE ; SECDEF WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE ; CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI ROUTINE

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From: SMART Archive  
Sent: 5/12/2014 3:44:50 AM  
To: svcSMARTHBTSP06  
Subject: Seoul Daily for Monday, May 12, 2014

RELEASE IN  
PART B4,NR

CONFIDENTIAL  
Sensitive

NON-RESPONSIVE  
PORTIONS REDACTED

MRN: 14 MDA 3767  
Date/DTG: May 12, 2014 / 120744Z MAY 14  
From: Bassett, Leslie A  
E.O.: 13526  
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, MOPS, WFP, KS, KN, JA, ENRG  
Captions: SENSITIVE  
Subject: Seoul Daily for Monday, May 12, 2014



NR

(SBU) Post-Sewol Polling Shows Significant Drop for President Park and NFP: Polling released May 12 by RealMeter indicates that the approval rate for President Park is 52 percent, [REDACTED] Before the Sewol sinking, Park's approval rate was at 64-65%, according to Asan and Gallup. The 12% drop in Park's approval rate is accompanied by a significant rise in disapproval for her performance, with Asan showing a rise from 29% before the sinking to 47% now. RealMeter and Gallup have disapproval for Park at 41%, an increase of approximately 14% from before the Sewol. Support for Park's New Frontier Party (Saenuri) has dropped to 39%, according to Gallup, with main opposition New Politics Alliance for Democracy (NPAD) at 23%. The polling indicates that at this time approximately 33% of the voters do not support any political party. Official campaigning for the June 4 nationwide local elections will begin May 21. We expect more polling to be released soon for individual races but it is noteworthy that the NPAD has so far not been able to capitalize on the drop in approval for Park and the NFP, rather it appears that the public is frustrated with politicians. Saenuri is conducting its primary for the highest-profile Seoul mayor contest on May 12, with leading candidates Rep. Chung Mong-joon and former PM Kim Hwang-sik running against each other. Dissatisfaction with the Park administration and media coverage following the Sewol sinking -- alleged to be both insensitive and pro-President Park -- has been expressed increasingly in recent days through small-scale protests in central Seoul in the area near the Chancery and the Blue House.

B4

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Lahiguera, Senior  
Reviewer

NR



<b>Classified By:</b>	Name: Leslie A. Bassett, Title: Deputy Chief of Mission Office: EXEC Agency: STATE
<b>Reason:</b>	1.4 (b), (d)
<b>Declassify On:</b>	2024/05/12
<b>Drafted By:</b>	SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A
<b>Approved By:</b>	SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A
<b>Released By:</b>	SEOUL:Bassett, Leslie A

Info:

NR

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**From:** SMART Archive  
**Sent:** 5/15/2014 4:47:44 AM  
**To:** svcSMARTHBTSP03  
**Subject:** Local Elections Coming at Time of National Reflection over Tragedy

RELEASE IN  
PART  
1.4(B),B1,1.4(D)

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**MRN:** 14 SEOUL 477  
**Date/DTG:** May 15, 2014 / 150848Z MAY 14  
**From:** AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
**Action:** WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE  
**E.O.:** 13526  
**TAGS:** PGOV, KS  
**Subject:** Local Elections Coming at Time of National Reflection over Tragedy

1. (C) Summary: Candidates for the June 4 local elections, that will include races for coveted mayorships and governorships throughout South Korea, are gearing up for the May 21 official start of election season. As preparations are underway, bodies are still being recovered from the site of the Sewol sinking, and national mourning continues for the more than 300 victims -- most of them high school students -- who perished. It remains unclear how the tragedy will ultimately impact the elections, but polling suggests anger and frustration is being directed not only at the administration, but both parties, who have seen a notable decline in support. President Park Geun-hye's carefully crafted image as a decisive and competent leader has also been undermined, with widespread perceptions her government responded slowly to the accident and initially promulgated misinformation about its severity. Public pressure forced Park to apologize to affected families after her first apology at a cabinet meeting was widely criticized as lacking sympathy and a sense of responsibility.

2. (C) In most instances, the Sewol tragedy appears to be a secondary variable in the upcoming elections. An examination of mayoral races in Korea's southeastern conservative bastions of Busan and Daegu shows opposition candidates who are serious contenders, but campaign staffers and journalists argue that these candidates' success hinges on keeping a safe distance from the united opposition New Politics Alliance for Democracy (NPAD) and making the race about their individual candidacies. While victories in Busan and Daegu would be huge symbolic victories for the opposition, Seoul remains the biggest prize. In this race the Sewol incident has, unexpectedly, had a major impact. Ruling New Frontier Party (NFP, or Saenuri) candidate Chung Mong-joon, who once led in polls, now trails by double digits incumbent NPAD mayor Park Won-soon following revelations Chung's teenage son described Korean reactions to Sewol as "primitive" in his social media posts.

3. (C) Comment: Though still early to assess accurately, experts and insiders largely agree that continued public disenchantment with both parties would lead to low voter turnout. In many key contests throughout the country this will be favorable for the Saenuri candidate, as the party's conservative base has a proven track record of showing up on election day. End comment.

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Lahiguera, Senior Reviewer

Opposition Unable to Capitalize on Anger at Government and Ruling Party

4. (C) The Sewol tragedy has unleashed a firestorm of criticism towards the Park Geun-hye administration and her Saenuri Party for perceived mismanagement and unwillingness to accept responsibility. Korea Gallup surveys show a 13 point drop in those who approve of President Park's job performance from 59 percent the week of the accident, to 46 percent the first week of May. Park has fallen below 50 percent before, but 46 percent is a new low. Disapprovals have now risen to 41 percent for the president, increasing from 28 percent the week of the accident, according to Gallup. These polling results are consistent with yet-to-be-published Asan Institute polling, according to analysts there.

5. (C) Public antipathy for the administration and ruling party, however, has not reversed the public's dismal support for the united opposition party New Politics Alliance for Democracy (NPAD). Both Saenuri and NPAD have seen a decline in support since the April 16 tragedy, suggesting the public is not being selective in its condemnation of the perceived inadequate response to the tragedy by the government -- to include politicians -- as a whole. Saenuri has seen its numbers fall from 45 to 39 percent, and NPAD from 26 to 23 percent, according to Gallup.

Park's Mea Culpa(s) Under Scrutiny: Once Heralded Leadership Skills in Question



B1  
1.4(B)

7. (C) [redacted] said that President Park's image as a good manager of state affairs had been seriously damaged by the Sewol incident. [redacted] explained that the president's past strong approval ratings were a reflection of an older generation's emotional connection to her having witnessed the tragic killing of both her parents, and due to continued national pride in her father's economic accomplishments. [redacted] expects the president's base of support will remain, but said swing voters are turning on her according to multiple polls.

B1  
1.4(B)

8. (C) [redacted] on May 8 told us Sewol was a turning point for Park's high popularity, but cited her strong base and mastery at deflecting criticism as key to her continued political resilience. [redacted] meeting with poloff said for all Park's political prowess, she lacks some basic political instincts. [redacted] opined that Park, a former engineering student, is a meticulous taskmaster who wants to prepare measures to address problems, but people also need a sympathetic leader with whom they can connect with in a time of mourning.

1.4(D)  
B1  
1.4(D)  
B1

Trouble in Paradise? Saenuri Candidates Face Serious Challenges in Conservative Southeast

9. (C) On a recent trip to South Korea's conservative southeast, it was clear opinion leaders, reporters, and party officials were registering public anger and frustration with the handling of the Sewol ferry sinking, but doubted

these would be key drivers of people's decisions at the June ballot box. Of primary concern for Saenuri mayoral candidates in Busan and Daegu is public sentiment the party has taken local support for granted and not engineered policies to remedy their ailing economies and declining populations. Campaign staffers and journalists argued that the public desires candidates who have the potential to shine on the national stage, and are not just party nominated loyalists reaping rewards for past service or sacrifice.

10. (C) The race for the Busan mayoralship, one of a handful of coveted prizes in the upcoming local elections, in many ways reflects the political dynamics that are occurring nationwide. An ailing economy, rising unemployment, and frustration with political parties -- particularly Saenuri -- for not delivering has led to strong support for independent candidate Oh Geo-don. [redacted] told us May 8 that Oh's biggest challenge in the short-term was distancing himself from the opposition NPAD, though he will ultimately need the opposition party's endorsement, and its candidate's acquiescence, if he hopes to win office. [redacted] pointed to several local polls that had Oh ahead of Saenuri's candidate Suh Byung-soo in a two-way race. In the last presidential election, opposition candidate Moon Jae-in reaped nearly 40 percent of the vote, signaling the Busan public's increasingly willingness to trump tradition by not voting for the conservative.

B1  
1.4(D)

B1  
1.4(D)

11. (C) In the mayoral contest in Daegu, home of former president and local hero Park Chung-hee, Saenuri faces another serious challenge, but in this case directly from NPAD candidate Kim Boo-kyum. [redacted] with strong political connections, told us May 9 that in the recent past it would have been unthinkable for an opposition candidate to be a serious contender for mayor, but this is turning out to be an extraordinary race. [redacted]

B1  
1.4(D)

[redacted] Frustration with Saenuri over the ailing economy, however, appears to have changed Kim's fortunes. Moreover, its candidate for mayor, Kwon Young-jin, is considered an outsider with little potential for national prominence, an aspect that is very important to Daegu residents given the long list of former national leaders from the area, [redacted] explained. Nevertheless, NPAD candidate Kim must proceed carefully in this conservative stronghold and avoid any criticism of President Park, [redacted] told us. Kim has even gone so far as to include in his campaign pledges a promise to build a Park Chung-hee visitor's center as a tribute to the fallen leader. The opposition candidate's strong Daegu connections and knowledge, combined with his moderate policy positions and prominence as a proven national politician who once sat on his party's Supreme Council, just may give him the edge for an unprecedented win.

#### Unseating Seoul's Mayor Park Tall Order for Wealthy Conservative Chung Mong-joon

12. (C) While Busan and a handful of other cities and regions -- such as Gyeonggi Province, South Chungcheong Province, and Incheon -- are coveted symbolic prizes in the upcoming elections, Seoul remains the ultimate trophy. The capitol's mayoralship has been a spring board for the presidency and carries significant influence. This race, more so than others, appears to have been impacted by public sentiments surrounding the Sewol sinking. Saenuri's Chung Mong-joon -- Hyundai heir, seven-term lawmaker, and past presidential candidate -- led in early April polling in the match-up against NPAD incumbent Park Won-soon. This was before Chung's teenage son used social media to disparage South Korean society as primitive for its emotional reaction in the wake of the Sewol tragedy and for criticizing President Park. *Chosun Ilbo* and *Media Research* have reported that Chung now trails Park 53 to 33 percent. *Hyundai Research Institute* has Park leading Chung 46 percent to 31, a big hurdle, even for someone with as deep pockets and political connections as Chung.

#### To Vote, or Not to Vote: That is the Question

13. (C) Unlike the Seoul mayor contest, the impact of Sewol probably will be less explicit a factor in the numerous local contests on June 4. [redacted] journalists we spoke with echoed a widespread sentiment among political insiders that the public's antipathy for both parties will encourage swing voters and young people

B1  
1.4(D)

to sit this election out, with the added incentive that the day is a national holiday and many people can make short trips outside their areas. Low voter turnout would almost certainly be a negative for opposition candidates nationwide, and disastrous for opposition hopefuls in the southeast. Conservatives and older voters have consistently shown that they can be relied upon to cast ballots. Their support of Saenuri candidates is, in the majority of regions, perfunctory. Professor [redacted] argued that this election will ultimately hinge on who voters dislike least, and that a low voter turnout would favor conservatives who might coalesce to protect their president and her diminishing approval numbers.

B1  
1.4(D)

Signature: Bassett

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Classified By:	Name: Edward K.H. Dong, Title: Political Minister Counselor
Derived From:	DSCG 11-01
Declassify On:	2039/05/15
Drafted By:	SEOUL:White, Heath H
Cleared By:	Seoul:Hines, Thomas R
Approved By:	Seoul:Dong, Edward K
Released By:	SEOUL:White, Heath H

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