

# [***South Korean police investigating 14-year-old boy as suspect of attack on lawmaker***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B65-1KH1-DYMD-613K-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

SEOUL, South Korea — An assailant who repeatedly struck a South Korean lawmaker with a rock as she tried to resist was a 14-year-old boy who was sent to a mental health facility Friday, Seoul police said as they continue to investigate the attack.

The attack Thursday on Bae Hyunjin, a member of the conservative ruling party, came just weeks after [*a man stabbed opposition leader Lee Jae-myung*](https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-lee-opposition-leader-stabbing-84aa9e86d3fc1413a77c89aeba6bad10) in the neck, and it raised further concerns about the toxic discourse around the country’s intensely polarized ***politics***.

Bae was treated for cuts. [*Doctors said she avoided serious injury*](https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-lawmaker-attack-dacfb7392fde247387756e08e73d6679).

Police investigators who interviewed the middle-schooler suspect in the presence of his parents sent him to a hospital early Friday where they plan to continue investigating him, said Cheon Young-gil, an official at Seoul’s Gangnam district police station.

South Korea’s laws allow for emergency admissions in which a person suspected of mental illness can be hospitalized for a maximum three days, based on consent of doctors and police, if there is concern the person could inflict harm on other people or themselves.

Cheon refused to discuss the health details of the suspect, who was detained at the scene following the attack Thursday afternoon at a building in southern Seoul. South Korean media, citing anonymous acquaintances of the boy, reported that he had been receiving treatment for depression.

“The emergency admission was based on consideration of the suspect’s age and his health condition,” Cheon said, without elaborating. He said the police could seek to extend the boy’s admission at the hospital after the initial three days if his parents agree.

Police also interviewed Bae Friday at the Soonchunhyang University Seoul Hospital where she continued to receive treatment. Bae's office released photos of her blood-splattered coat and sweater, which were reportedly presented to the police as evidence.

The motive of the attack wasn’t immediately clear.

Bae was elected in 2020 and is seen as a close confidante of President Yoon Suk Yeol, whose office pledged a thorough investigation of the attack. Politicians from both Yoon’s People Power Party and the liberal opposition have denounced the attack as an assault on the country’s democracy. “Our ***politics*** have lost their way. We have all talked about the need to end the ***politics*** of hate, but the language we throw at our opponents remains sharp, and old-fashioned ***politics*** that cater only to the most extreme, hard-core supporters continue to thrive,” People Power Party spokesperson Jung Kwang-jae said.

South Korean ***politics*** is deeply divided along ideological and generational lines and regional loyalties, and the bickering between political parties has intensified ahead of the parliamentary elections in April. The elections are widely seen as a referendum on Yoon, who has already been struggling with low approval ratings and an opposition-controlled National Assembly that has limited the implementation of his agenda.

Security camera footage showed the attacker, wearing a gray skullcap and a mask, approached Bae inside a building hallway and seemed to start talking to her before striking her with what appeared to be a small rock. He continued to hack at Bae, even after she fell. She resisted alone, waving her arms and grabbing the attacker wrist, before another person appeared out of a door and attempted to intervene.

The opposition leader Lee, who was treated in a hospital for eight days after his attack, released a statement about the attack on Bae, saying that his scar “is aching again after this unbelievable incident” and that he prayed for her swift recovery.

Lee narrowly lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon, and the suspect in his attack allegedly told investigators he wanted to kill Lee to prevent him from becoming a future president.

South Korea has had other recent attacks on political figures.

In 2022, Song Young-gil, then the leader of Lee’s Democratic Party, was [*assaulted by a man wielding a hammer*](https://apnews.com/article/elections-media-seoul-south-korea-lee-jin-31d0b69b6013943a90082c0824ca276c) during a rally in support of Lee’s presidential campaign. Song needed stitches but avoided serious injury.

In 2006, a man used a box cutter against Park Geun-hye, then a conservative opposition leader, during an election rally. Park, who was later elected president in 2012, was given 60 stitches to close an 11-centimeter (4-inch) gash on her face.

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