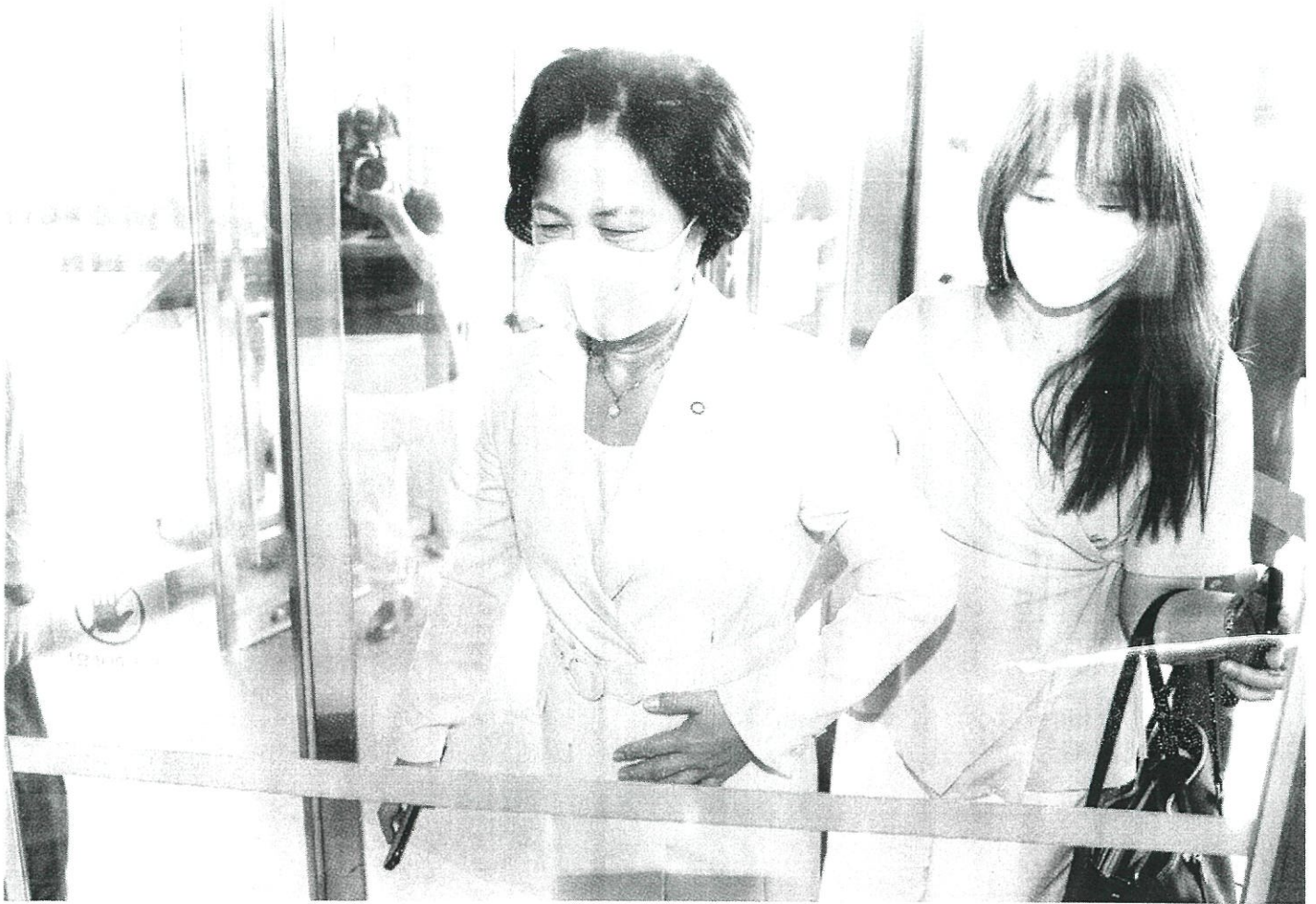


# Justice minister asked defense ministry to do favor for her son in military, document shows N. 1

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Justice Minister Choo Mi-ae / Yonhap

Justice Minister Choo Mi-ae and her husband asked the defense ministry in 2017 to extend medical leave for their son who was serving his mandatory military duty at the time, according to documents apparently written by the ministry.

Choo has come under fire over allegations that she used her influence to seek special favors for her son, who served in the Korean Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA) for the 2nd Infantry Division of the U.S. 8th Army. Choo was chairwoman of the ruling Democratic Party at the time.

According to the documents seen Wednesday and apparently written recently by the personnel office of the Ministry of National Defense, a then master sergeant in charge of the support team had two meetings with Choo's son regarding his medical leave.

The son, surnamed Seo and now 27 years old, took his first medical leave from June 5-14, 2017, to receive knee surgery, and extended it once through June 23. For four days after that, he used his personal vacation days before returning to his unit. The allegations are that those last days were not approved in advance but he was able to extend his leave without first returning to base thanks to his mother's influence.

"(Seo) inquired about ways to extend his medical leave because he has yet to fully recover," the master sergeant wrote in records of their second meeting, which are summarized in the documents. The records are dated June 15, 2017. The first meeting took place in April.

"(I) had told him before he went on leave that medical leave is permitted up to one month, but (Seo) said he felt

bad about asking (me), and while consulting his parents, found out that they had already filed a request," he wrote.

The master sergeant continued, "I told him that he has nothing to feel bad about and firmly requested that he ask (me) directly next time and resolve his questions that way."

The records, if true, indicate that Choo and her husband personally made a request regarding their son's leave with the defense ministry before the first leave ended.

They also show that Seo told the master sergeant that he would send a doctor's note the following week because the doctor was away for business. The master sergeant told Seo to use his personal vacation days until an assessment of medical leave is complete, and when the medical leave is approved for extension, the vacation days would be restored.

Seo's lawyer has made similar claims.

In a statement Tuesday, the lawyer said the second medical leave was first approved verbally, and following instructions, the supporting documents were sent by email on June 21, 2017.

The allegations of preferential treatment have become the latest political football, with the main opposition People Power Party calling on President Moon Jae-in to take a stand, and the Democratic Party dismissing the case as groundless.

Other key allegations surrounding Seo are his family's reported attempt to get him assigned to a base in Seoul, rather than in Uijeongbu, north of the capital, and their reported push to have him selected as an interpreter for the February 2018 PyeongChang Winter Games.

Prosecutors launched an investigation into the alleged preferential treatment in January, but no progress has been announced.

Choo has denied abusing her power to get special favors for her son. (Yonhap)

N3

y Lee Gyu-lee

Members of K-pop group BTS are facing accusations they are using a graduate program to delay their mandatory military duty.

Speculation started swirling when their agency, Big Hit Entertainment, said Tuesday that Jinmin and V will start their MBA program in advertising and media management at Hanyang Cyber University in September.

The agency said Jin has also been taking classes for the same program since 2017 – and RM, Suga, and J-Hope joined him in March last year.

Jungkook, the youngest member, who is working on his undergraduate degree at the Global Cyber University, is the only member who is not attending the MBA program.

Questions have been raised about whether the members are just trying to buy time and delay their military service as much as possible.

"Isn't it obvious that they are trying to delay the military duty?" a user wrote on an online community.

"Graduate school is a common excuse male K-pop artists use," another user wrote.

Under the law, all eligible Korean men over 18 are liable for military duty and are required to enlist. However, they can delay enlistment up until they turn 28, under specific circumstances, including studying for a master's degree.

Jin, 27, who has been enrolled since 2017, is qualified to postpone the duty until he graduates or turns 28. The other members now can do the same.

But the agency told local media that "the members enrolled on their own will to pursue higher education."

Military duty has long been a troubling issue for the group and its fans, as it would mean the group would have to halt its act for at least 18 months during the service.

Discussion of the group's military exemption emerged when a fan club launched a petition on the presidential website in 2018.

The call for exemption was brought to the attention of lawmakers several times, leading the defense, military, and cultural ministries to form a task force to review the revision of the exemption qualification.

However, the defense ministry concluded that K-pop artists, including BTS, will not be given the privilege.

"Exempting pop culture artists from military service, even though they have contributed to the country's reputation, is not in line with the government's stance to uphold justice and fairness," the ministry said during a press briefing last November.

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gyulee@koreatimes.co.kr More articles by this reporter

N4

By Kim Se-jeong

The Seoul Metropolitan Government plans to roll out a new tourism promotional video Friday, featuring BTS, the K-pop group that made history recently by landing at No.1 on Billboard's main singles chart.

The video will be available on [visitseoul.net](http://visitseoul.net), the city's official tourism website, as well as its other social medial channels at 5 p.m. on Friday.

Titled "See You in Seoul," the 112-second video will have each of the seven BTS members introducing seven attractions of the city which include cosmetic shops, inner-city walking tours, activities on the Han River, street food, nightlife, royal palaces and Dongdaemun Design Plaza.

"I hope the video will make those who want to travel feel a bit better while travel is restricted due to COVID-19. The city also hopes that when people start to travel again, their first destination will be Seoul," said Joo Yong-tae, an official responsible for the city's tourism policies.

It's not the first time the city government has worked with BTS. The group members became the city's tourism ambassadors in 2017 and were featured in other promotional videos. This year's video is considered particularly special because of their newfound worldwide success.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Korea to close down its borders, hitting the tourism industry hard for Seoul which is the most visited place in Korea.

Last year, more than 8 million tourists visited Seoul, according to travel statistics. But this year's total, from January to June, was little more than 2 million.

Tours receiving inbound tourists were stopped due to the sharp decrease in visitors. Some businesses related to Seoul's tourism attractions have gone bankrupt. The numbers of tourists bounced back a little bit toward summer, but fell back again in August after the number of cases soared in Seoul and its metropolitan area.

To help businesses cope with the pandemic, the city government provided financial support for our agencies and hotels in its jurisdiction. Also, the city created online tourism content to share with prospective visitors.

[skim@koreatimes.co.kr](mailto:skim@koreatimes.co.kr) More articles by this reporter

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Do you think it is wrong for a mother to help her son?

Why are some people upset that Justice Minister Choo allegedly asked the defense department to extend medical leave for her son?

If you had powerful parents, would you expect them to use their influence to help you?

Do you think preferential treatment is bad?

If the allegations are true, what should happen to Minister Choo and her son?

An investigation was launched in January about these allegations but no progress has been made yet. What is taking so long?

When was the last time you asked a favor of someone? Did they do it?

When was the last time you were asked to do a favor? Did you do it?

Should there be mandatory military duty?

Should graduate school be a specific circumstance for delaying military service?

What's wrong with delaying military service?

In your opinion, why are some people upset that BTS members are delaying military service?

Do you think celebrities should be exempt from military service?

Don't the members of BTS serve Korea by being Korea tourism promoters?

Why aren't women doing national service?

Of the seven city attractions, which one interests you the most/least?

When you can travel again, what will be your first destination?

In your opinion, what is Korea's best tourism draw? (Example: celebrities, nature, food etc.)

Seoul lost 20,000 businesses from January to June. Should the municipal government provide more financial support?

What did you learn from these articles?

What would you like to bring to my attention?