

Newsroom

Draconian media bill postponed for joint study



Democratic Party floor leader Yun Ho-jung, right, shakes hands on Tuesday at the National Assembly with his People Power Party counterpart Kim Gi-hyeon, left, after the two parties reached an agreement to create a consultative body to review a controversial media bill at a meeting convened by Speaker Park Byeong-seug. [LIM HYUN-DONG]

The ruling Democratic Party (DP) and main opposition People Power Party (PPP) agreed Tuesday to create an eight-member consultative body of lawmakers and media experts to review the controversial media bill, which failed to be voted on Monday and Tuesday.

The parties, which have been at loggerheads since the bill's introduction in the parliamentary Culture, Sports and Tourism Committee, also agreed to delay the introduction of the bill – which would impose a five-fold increase in penalties on media outlets that publish fake or fabricated reports – to a Sept. 27 National Assembly plenary session.

Parliamentary floor leaders Yun Ho-jung of the DP and Kim Gi-hyeon of the PPP reached the agreement at a Tuesday morning meeting convened by National Assembly Speaker Park Byeong-seug after talks all day Monday failed to produce an accord.

The PPP threatened to filibuster the bill's passage into law after it was approved by the Legislation and Judiciary Committee last Thursday.

According to the floor leaders' agreement, the eight-member consultative body will be composed of two lawmakers from the DP and two from the PPP, and each party will recommend two media experts. The body will examine the DP's proposed amendment to the Press Arbitration Act.

The agreement marked a new twist for the controversial bill.

Before Tuesday, the DP had used its majority on both the Culture, Sports and Tourism Committee, where the bill originated, and the Legislation and Judiciary Committee, which acts as a gatekeeper for bills to be presented for a full parliamentary vote, to push the bill to the National Assembly floor, where it controls an absolute 60 percent majority in the 300-seat legislature.

However, the bill's approval by the judiciary committee past midnight on Aug. 25 meant it could not be submitted for a full parliamentary vote that same day due to parliamentary regulations which precludes bills from being voted upon if they have passed committee review less than 24 hours before.

The legislature called its 390th extraordinary plenary session to vote on this bill. After initially being scheduled for Aug. 25, it was delayed to Monday, and then again to Tuesday due to the parties' conflict over the bill. Tuesday's plenary session was held without the bill being introduced.

Opposition to the bill came not just from the PPP but also from minor parties such as the progressive Justice Party, civic groups and media industry associations.

The bill attracted harsh criticism from both domestic and international media organizations, including the Journalists Association of Korea, Seoul Foreign Correspondents' Club (SFCC), the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), all of whom have expressed concerns over the bill's effect on freedom of expression.

President Moon Jae-in broke his silence on the bill on Tuesday with comments welcoming the parties' decision to review the bill.

Is there a lot of fake news in Korea? If you think there is a lot, what is the reason?

Can you think of an example of fake news?

Do you trust the 중앙일보?

Do you trust the Democratic Party?

Do you think the People Power Party is right to oppose this bill?

Who or what deserves harsh criticism in your opinion?

When have you been at loggerheads with someone?



CHINA'S EDUCATION MINISTRY HAS BANNED SCHOOLS FROM GIVING WRITTEN EXAMS TO FIRST- AND SECOND-GRADERS. PHOTO: LUO YUNFEI/CHINA NEWS SERVICE VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Chinese government is ordering schools to drastically cut the number of exams, as part of the state's sweeping reform to ease the burden on students.

China's education ministry said on Monday that primary school students should not be asked to take written exams in the first and second grades, while older pupils could be given only one exam at the end of every semester.

The policy is being imposed as part of a broader state initiative to reduce students' academic load, the ministry said in an online statement. In July, the government announced a ban on for-profit afterschool tutoring, which helps students get ahead in subjects like mathematics and English. The ban has caused a stock market sell-off and a wave of lay-offs in the once-lucrative education industry.

The government said the goal is to take some pressure off students, cut their parents' education spending, and ensure children's healthy growth. Some analysts have said authorities also wanted to strengthen the dominance of public schools and encourage people to have more children.

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Giving exams is also widely believed to be the most effective way of making sure students have grasped what they have been taught in school.

The policy has triggered a backlash on the internet, as people question if it will only make the lives of students, parents, and teachers more difficult, given the intense competition to get into better high schools and universities.

“How do we find out their study progress if we cannot test them?” said one of the top-voted comments under a state media post on the microblogging site Weibo. The critical comments were later removed.

Some parents said they would have to arrange their own exams at home to make sure their children are keeping up with school.

“Primary school is for laying the foundation,” another Weibo user commented. “If children cannot learn and get used to written tests at this time, and are not able to catch up later, whose responsibility is that?”

Most young workers in China grew up under an exam-obsessed education system, and some are skeptical that the new measures could be enforced: at the end of the day, students have to be ranked to determine who can enter the elite universities.

“If a child cannot cope with exam rankings, how do they cope with the tougher challenges in life?” an internet user commented.

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drastic, burden, impose, initiative, ban, lucrative, innovative, grueling, grasp, backlash, intense, skeptical

What is your opinion of the Chinese government ordering schools to drastically cut the number of exams?

Do you think that primary students in Korea are burdened by too many exams?

Do you think education policy should be imposed by the government or should individual schools take the initiative?

What should be the goal of elementary school education?

Should high school students be ranked according to their test scores?

Are tests the best way to make sure students have grasped the information?

Did you go to a 학원 or have a tutor when you were in elementary school?

Should private tutoring for young children be banned in Korea?

What is your opinion of the 수능 exam?

What subject did you have trouble grasping in high school?

Are you tested too much at MU?

I am skeptical about