

The Korea Times

Roh Wins MDP Presidential Nomination

By Kim Kwang-tae
Staff Reporter

A former human rights lawyer won the ruling party's nomination for the December presidential election in the Seoul primary at Chamsil Stadium on Saturday, in the last of the 16 primaries that have been held across the country since early March.

Roh Moo-hyun, 56, won 17,557 ballots or 72.2 percent in the ruling Millennium Democratic Party's primaries, easily defeating his only remaining challenger Chung Dong-young, a former television anchorman, who grabbed 6,767 votes or 27.8 percent.

A series of recent opinion polls has put the reformist presidential candidate far ahead of Lee Hoi-chang, the leading opposition presidential hopeful, as the likely successor to incumbent President Kim Dae-jung, who is barred by the Constitution from seeking re-election after his single five-year term ends in February next year.

Until early March when the primaries began, few, if any, had expected Roh to prevail in the primaries and eventually win the party's blessing for the December 19 presidential election.

Roh's triumph in the primaries is seen by many as the reflection of the growing desire for change by young and middle-aged voters, who are fed up with politics being tainted by corruption scandals, cronyism and regional favoritism.

Meanwhile, Rep. Hahn Hwa-kap was elected as the MDP's new chairman and seven others were also elected as supreme councilors at the national convention held at the same stadium.

In his acceptance speech, Roh presented what he saw as his three major national tasks — political reform, national reconciliation, and principle and confidence.

The reformist presidential candidate vowed to stamp out endemic corruption, noting that a privileged consciousness, which he said is deeply ingrained, and the dark political culture have to come to an end.

“All political scandals occurred because the figures around the president and high-level government officials clung to the outdated culture of vested interests and foul play,” Roh said.

Recently, a string of corruption scandals allegedly involving the three sons of President Kim have come to the fore, unleashing public denunciations of the government, which has led people to call for reform.

“I would make a society where principles are upheld by ridding our society of old practices deeply mired in opportunism, cronyism and regional favoritism,” Roh said, adding that he would make sure no region is discriminated against or marginalized.

He also reaffirmed his commitment to redrawing the current political map, stressing that reformist political forces have to join forces.

“The current political landscape must be changed to overcome regional antagonism,” Roh said, adding that a new order will naturally be initiated by many political organizations.

Touching on inter-Korean relations, Roh pledged to carry on President Kim's “sunshine policy” of pursuing peace and reconciliation with North Korea.

Roh, who comes from a poor farming family, also vowed to continue President Kim's economic program of market reforms, but with emphasis on helping the country's have-nots. “It is time to harmonize economic growth with the distribution of wealth.”

입력시간 2002/04/28 17:22

The Korea Herald Editorial (April 29, 2002)

Editorial] Winds of change (☒)

The ruling Millennium Democratic Party wrapped up its political experiment of presidential primaries amid loud celebrations in Seoul Saturday. Roh Moo-hyun, a lawyer-turned-reformist politician, emerged as the surprise winner in the 49-day national tour to become the MDP's standard-bearer in the Dec. 19 presidential polls. Roh is at once the beneficiary of the U.S.-style nomination process and its

benefactor by helping its successful introduction here. Now the voters' interests are on how long the "Roh tempest" will continue.

Behind the largely unnoticed underdog's meteoric rise was the people's aversion for corrupt, unprincipled politicians. The precipitous fall of Roh's archrival, Rhee In-je, also showed opportunistic centrists have little room to stand. Even President Kim Dae-jung, despite his considerable successes in economic recovery and inter-Korean rapprochement, is reeling from the seemingly endless scandals involving his aides and relatives. The electorate thirsty for change might have seen glimmers of hope in this maverick politician.

As a politician, Roh sets himself apart from other Blue House aspirants. Once derided as the "Don Quixote" of election campaigns, Roh kept running in the southeastern Gyeongsang region with the ticket of the party based in the rival Jeolla area - and failed. The former human rights lawyer also challenged the "two Kims" - President Kim Dae-jung and his predecessor Kim Young-sam - and ran independently. He was crushed on both occasions, earning another nickname of "Roh Moo-hyun, the fool."

His persistent struggle to break the impregnable regional bias and his bold defiance, albeit temporary, of the big bosses' authorities instead won him a fanatic bunch of supporters. Called the "Roh Lovers' Group," they played a key role in stirring up the Roh boom throughout the primaries, both on and offline. Mostly born after the Korean War (1950-53), the approximately 18,000 members range from students to office workers, the self-employed, soldiers and journalists. They hate authority and seek changes.

In his acceptance speech, Roh stressed continuous reform amid social integration. He would maintain President Kim's economic reform but focus more on a fairer distribution of wealth and a wider safety net for the underprivileged. Diplomatically, Roh believes in Seoul taking a greater initiative in inter-Korean detente and a more "level" relationship with Washington. Roh agrees on the need for the U.S. troop presence here but thinks the Yongsan base should be relocated and the SOFA be revised to be more equitable.

The 56-year-old, two-term lawmaker's life history explains his philosophy. Born as the youngest son of a poor farmer, Roh's formal education stopped at a commercial high school. With intelligence and perseverance, he taught himself to pass the bar exam. A turning point came in the early 1980s when he took up cases of student dissidents and labor activists under the authoritarian Chun Doo-hwan regime. At a parliamentary hearing later, the newly-elected lawmaker won fame with his sharp and logical

questioning of Chun, who had once arrested him.

Roh's political wheel of fortune, however, has just started to turn in earnest. In the run-up to the December election, he will have to withstand a grueling series of tests over his caliber and integrity as the would-be ruler of a country. Already, the opposition Grand National Party is taking issue with his left-of-center ideology, economically and politically, lack of administrative experiences and even what they say is his alleged wealth and extramarital affairs "under a clean and moral political mantle."

Nor is his expected GNP opponent an easy mark. Lee Hoi-chang, former GNP head, is sweeping more than 80 percent of votes, compared with Roh's 72 percent, in their respective party's primaries. The former chief justice-turned-prime minister is actually a formidable foe in terms of career and experience. Roh says he would relegate day-to-day administration to the prime minister, while focusing on external and grander programs. He believes President Kim tried to do too much by himself to little effect.

Roh will most likely have to wage an uphill struggle with a more experienced, conservative adversary backed by the establishment sticking to their vested interests. Curious, if not suspicious, eyes from the conservative-dominated United States and Japan will also prove to be burdensome. Roh should actively persuade them about the difference between popular service and populism, and between sovereign rights and nationalism. The first big test will come in June, when Roh must lead the MDP to victory in local elections.

The ruling party's first-ever experiment will remain long in the nation's political history. It confirmed the people's participatory zeal, so far repressed under frustration and sarcasm. Koreans snatched their political rights from military generals, realized the first "horizontal" change of government by an opposition party and went a step closer to participatory democracy by electing their own candidates. Whether the temporary tempest would turn into constant and fresh winds of change is up to the candidate and voters.

2002.04.29

NYT

April 28, 2002

Party Backs Rights Lawyer in South Korea

By DON KIRK

SEOUL, South Korea, April 27 — A 55-year-old former dissident was nominated today as the candidate of President Kim Dae Jung's party for the presidential election coming up in December.

The candidate, Roh Moo Hyun, a lawyer who defended victims of human rights abuses and battled for workers against strike-breaking companies, easily won the nomination at the governing Millennium Democratic Party's convention after emerging as the clear winner in South Korea's first primary elections.

Mr. Kim, barred from running for a second five-year term under the Constitution that ended dictatorial rule by military leaders in 1987, had called for the primary system as the best way to select a candidate.

Mr. Kim did not support anyone publicly but was believed to have favored Mr. Roh, who has long espoused the same causes. Mr. Kim spent years in prison or under house arrest in the 1970's and 1980's because of his politics.

Mr. Roh previously served Mr. Kim's administration as maritime affairs and fisheries minister, an important post in a nation in which fishing is a major industry.

Although many political analysts have predicted that Mr. Roh would moderate his stance as a candidate, he pledged to "stand with the poor and the underprivileged."

Mr. Roh emerged as the clear front-runner when Rhee In Je, a onetime conservative who ran as an independent in the 1997 election and then

switched to Mr. Kim's party, withdrew after losing several primaries. Mr. Rhee's third-party campaign in 1997 was a pivotal factor in Mr. Kim's victory over Lee Hoi Chang, who is expected to run again as the candidate of the opposition Grand National Party.

Mr. Kim is believed to view Mr. Roh as the person most likely to carry on his "sunshine policy" of reconciliation with North Korea as well as his efforts to curb the power of the country's large corporations. Mr. Kim's policies have been under increasing pressure from conservatives, who control more seats than does the governing party in the National Assembly.

Mr. Lee was projected until recently as the front-runner, but Mr. Roh has surpassed him in recent polls. Mr. Roh may also benefit from the defection from Mr. Lee's party of Park Geun Hye, the daughter of Park Chung Hee, who ruled the country for 18 years until his assassination in 1979. On Friday, Ms. Park formed her own party, dedicated to principles that are still more conservative than those of Mr. Lee's Grand National Party.

TIME

<http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/article/0,13673,501020506-233994,00.html>

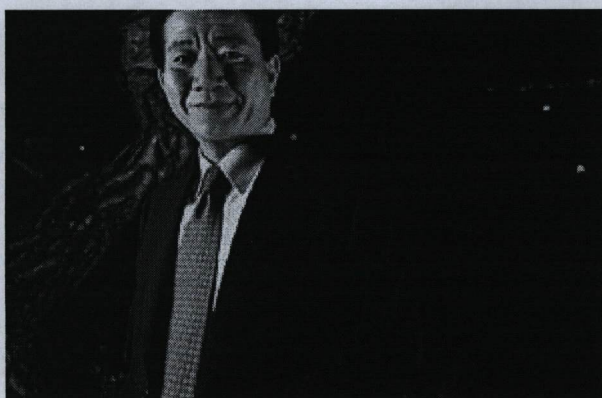
MAY 6, 2002/VOL. 159 NO. 17

Asia

People's Choice?

If he keeps his image clean, an iconoclastic Everyman could be South Korea's new chief

BY DONALD MACINTYRE/SEOUL



 **PRINT**  **E-MAIL**  **SUBSCRIBE**

KI HO PARK-KISTONE FOR TIME

Roh Moo Hyun, the man who could be South Korea's next President, appeals to the country's "youth vote," according to the pollsters.

Maybe that's because when

twenty-somethings see Roh on the news, they see not a crusted-over and compromised politician, but a new face they might just be able to trust. As a youngster Roh was given to smart-mouthing his teachers and goading his friends into mischief. When some pals worried they'd get in trouble if they snuck out on a bender, Roh egged them on, high-school friend Lee Dong Sun recalls: "He said 'If you worry about getting caught and about getting good grades and a job, when are we ever going to have fun?' "

Roh's having big fun now. After emerging as the decisive winner of a series of landmark primary elections last Saturday, the 55-year-old lawyer and erstwhile national assemblyman was anointed by the ruling

Millennium Democratic Party as its standard-bearer in upcoming presidential elections set for December. Stunned pundits are still trying to figure out how such an unknown and unorthodox politician could suddenly have pole position. His candidacy blew up out of nowhere, leading newspapers to dub the campaign the "Roh Tempest."

Credit in part Roh's man of the masses cachet. In South Korea, where most top political leaders are in their 70s, an outsider free from the taint of corruption is being welcomed like a long-lost brother. A former tax lawyer, Roh turned to defending student protesters and labor leaders during Korea's raucous pro-democracy movement in the 1980s. He radiates an antiestablishment vibe that is seductive to the working class and younger voters fed up with scandals and politicians who never seem to fade away. In an interview with TIME last week, Roh had this to say about Lee Hoi Chang, a conservative former Prime Minister and Supreme Court judge who, according to current polls, poses the strongest threat to Roh's presidential bid: "Lee speaks for the privileged. I am concerned about the common person."

Roh might have remained a commoner himself were it not for a change in Korea's election rules. In the past, the selection of presidential candidates was the preserve of party powerbrokers. This year, voters got a say in choosing through a primary system. As word of Roh's candidacy spread, normally apathetic younger Koreans started to buzz on Internet bulletin boards and some even launched fan clubs. "Roh's from a small village, he doesn't come from a good family and he doesn't have a college degree," says admirer Uh Ji Youn, 20, an English major at Dongguk University in Seoul. "He seems clean and genuine."

Roh comes by his populist leanings honestly. Born in a farming hamlet near the port city of Pusan, he grew up in a family that couldn't always afford rice. As a young man, he drifted through a succession of blue-collar jobs, then taught himself the law and passed Korea's notoriously difficult bar exam. In 1981, a friend asked him to help defend students arrested without a warrant and tortured by authorities for reading banned books. The sight of one student's severely battered feet, toenails ripped off by government goons, was a turning point. "I felt ashamed," Roh says.

"There were 100 lawyers in Pusan and not one was willing to stick his neck out." Though it was dangerous work, he began to take on human rights cases on behalf of those who ran afoul of Korea's then-authoritarian regime. "I think it's in my genes," Roh says of his iconoclastic streak. "My father was like that."

In the election run-up, he'll have to increasingly defend his pristine image in the mosh pit of Korean politics. A Gallup-Chosun Ilbo poll last week gave Roh 49% of the popular vote, well ahead of opposition Grand National Party hopeful Lee, at 36%. But if Park Geun Hye, daughter of former Korean autocrat Park Chung Hee, enters the race as she has hinted she might, Roh's power base could be splintered.

Even more problematic at the moment is Roh's relationship to lame-duck President Kim Dae Jung. The antiestablishment candidate has fully embraced Kim's market-oriented economic policies and Korea's economy is surging and consumer sentiment is at an all-time high. But aligning himself too closely with the incumbent could prove damaging. Kim's three sons have all been linked to scandals in recent weeks, and Kim's own clean-hands image is getting tarnished.

Roh appears to be putting distance between himself and Kim.

"Cooperation with the President would not do my campaign any good," Roh says, to explain why Kim won't be stumping for him next fall. Roh still needs support from party insiders if he is to win. Put too much space between candidate and the powerful center, and the outsider may in December find himself on the outside once again.