Beat: News

S. Korean PM Chung resigns over gov`t response to ferry disaster

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USPA News - South Korean Prime Minister Chung Hong-won announced his resignation on Sunday and apologized for the government`s much-criticized handling of the Sewol ferry sinking, saying the screams of the families of the victims were keeping him up at night. The 6,825-ton MV Sewol ferry sank on April 16 en-route from Incheon to the southern resort island of Jeju, killing at least 187 people and leaving 115 others missing and presumed dead.

The government`s initial response to the disaster has been criticized as slow and unorganized, with early reports claiming everyone on board - most of them students on a school trip - had been rescued. "This accident has left the public in great shock and sorrow, and the screams of the families of the missing still keep me up at night, despite the fact that it has been more than 10 days since the accident," Chung, the second in command in government, said at a news conference on Sunday. "On behalf of the government, I want to apologize for failing to deal with a series of problems, from taking preventive measures (before the accident) to the government`s initial response and the later measures," Chung said, bowing in apology. "Witnessing the sorrow of those who lost their loved ones and seeing the sadness and anger of the people, I felt it was the right thing for me to take all of the responsibility as the representative of the cabinet." The prime minister, who was booed and had a bottle of water thrown at him the day after the disaster, said he wanted to resign earlier but believed it was most responsible to wait until the conclusion of the accident. "However, now, because I can no longer be a burden on the administration of state affairs by keeping this position, I have decided to resign," he said. Min Kyung-wook, a spokesman for President Park Geun-hye, said the president had accepted Chung`s resignation but added that he would stay on until the situation settles down. He said dealing with the aftermath of the disaster, including the ongoing recovery operation, remains the top priority. The main opposition New Politics Alliance for Democracy (NPAD) immediately criticized Chung`s resignation, calling it "utterly irresponsible" and a "cowardly evasion of responsibility." The opposition party also called on Park to personally apologize over the government`s handling to the families of the victims. The Sewol ferry sinking is believed to be South Korea`s worst maritime disaster since the sinking of the Namyoung ferry in December 1970, killing more than 320 people. The sinking of the ferry Seohae near Wido island in Jeolla province in October 1993 resulted in the deaths of 292 passengers and crew.

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