

Members of South Korean boy band are required to serve in the military

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BTS performs "Fake Love" at the Billboard Music Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena on May 20, 2018, in Las Vegas, Nevada. Photo by: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

BTS is one of the most famous music groups to come from South Korea, a country in eastern Asia. They make music in the K-pop style, a uniquely Korean version of pop music. Passionate fans follow them around the world.

However, it appears the music will have to stop for now.

In South Korea, every man aged 18 to 35 must serve in the military for at least 21 months. The group members say they will follow this rule. They range in age from 21 to 25.

There have been some calls for BTS to be excused from this rule. Still, a South Korean government official told lawmakers this week that the boy band would fulfill its military duties.

"All of the BTS members say they will definitely enlist for military service," Do Jong-hwan said. He is the minister of culture, sports and tourism in South Korea.

The requirement to serve in the military is because of the constant threat from neighboring North Korea. The two countries were originally one country. Then, they were split up after World War II in the 1940s. The split broke into fighting from 1950 to 1953.

Athletes And Musicians Are Exempt, Pop Stars Are Not

In 1953, they agreed to stop fighting, but never promised peace between them. In 2018, relations appear to have improved between the two countries. Still, they are officially at war.

In recent years, the topic of required military duty has been much debated in South Korea. Many people wonder whether it is necessary. There's also the question of who deserves to be exempt, or excused, from service.

In September, the South Korean men's soccer team won a gold medal at the Asian Games tournament. This allowed all the members of the team to be excused from service. One such player was soccer star Son Heung-min. He plays for the Tottenham Hotspur soccer team in England.

Athletes like him, who bring home medals in international competitions, are excused. Famed artists, classical musicians and dancers can avoid service. However, pop stars, filmmakers or actors cannot.

BTS, the seven-member K-pop boy band, found itself at the center of the debate.

In July, lawmaker Ha Tae-kyung suggested that the exemption system was outdated. It was first created in 1973. He said that exceptions are made if you win "violin, piano and classical music competitions." However, he added, you are not excused if your music is ranked number one on the charts.

Rules Will Not Be Changed For BTS

BTS had two top albums this year on the music charts. The group has an enormous following on social media websites. It took home an American Music Award for Favorite Social Artist. In September, the band even gave a speech at the United Nations General Assembly. The United Nations is an organization of countries that work together to promote international cooperation.

Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon is a major leader in South Korea. He instructed his government to look at changing the exemption system. He urged the military last month "to come up with a more reasonable measure by reflecting the public's growing demands."

South Korea's Defense Ministry announced this year that it was looking to end nearly all exemptions to military service. There are already plans to reduce the number of soldiers from 618,000 to 500,000 and cut required service to 18 months, from 21 months. Still, military officials are estimating the population growth is slowing. They say this means even fewer people will be joining the military, even if required.

For now, the rules are unchanged. It looks like BTS will trade in their flashy fashion and dance moves for army wear and military drills.

"It is a shame that it is being reported as if the seven members (of BTS) are excusing themselves from military enlistment," Minister Do said. "As a matter of fact, they intend to do the exact opposite."

Quiz

- 1 Read the section "Rules Will Not Be Changed For BTS."
- Which detail shows why Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon wants South Korea to revise its military exemptions?
- (A) Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon is a major leader in South Korea. He instructed his government to look at changing the exemption system.
 - (B) He urged the military last month "to come up with a more reasonable measure by reflecting the public's growing demands."
 - (C) South Korea's Defense Ministry announced this year that it was looking to end nearly all exemptions to military service.
 - (D) Still, military officials are estimating the population growth is slowing. They say this means even fewer people will be joining the military, even if required.
- 2 When did South Korea begin excusing some people from military service? How do you know?
- (A) It started when North Korea and South Korea split apart; Then, they were split up after World War II in the 1940s. The split broke into fighting from 1950 to 1953.
 - (B) It started when North Korea and South Korea decided to stop fighting; In 1953, they agreed to stop fighting, but never promised peace between them.
 - (C) It started in 2018; In 2018, relations appear to have improved between the two countries. Still, they are officially at war.
 - (D) It started in 1973; In July, lawmaker Ha Tae-kyung suggested that the exemption system was outdated. It was first created in 1973.
- 3 What is the relationship between North Korea and South Korea?
- (A) The countries are actively fighting because they are at war.
 - (B) The countries are not fighting but still are technically at war.
 - (C) The countries are fighting even though they are not at war.
 - (D) The countries are not fighting because the war has ended.
- 4 Why did Minister Do Jong-hwan feel disappointed that there were reports that BTS members had excused themselves from enlisting?
- (A) because the reports stated something that he did not know
 - (B) because he thought that BTS had lied to him about enlisting
 - (C) because the reports are not true and BTS members do plan to enlist
 - (D) because he is worried that other musicians will do the same