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South Korea to Appeal Russian Men's Right to Apply for Asylum

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South Korea's Justice Ministry is to appeal a court ruling that granted two Russian men fleeing military mobilization the right to apply for refugee status, The Korea Times reported Wednesday.

Three men, whose identities haven't been disclosed to protect their family members in Russia arrived at Incheon International Airport late on various dates last year where they individually attempted to apply for asylum in South Korea.

However, their applications were rejected by the Justice Ministry, which said the men's grounds for seeking asylum were purely financial in nature. The men have been effectively left in limbo since then, and elected to camp inside the airport for months rather than return to Russia.

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Despite the fact that draft dodging is not a valid reason to receive refugee status under South Korean law — where all able-bodied men must serve 18 months of compulsory military service — the three men appealed the Justice Ministry decision in court.

The court eventually granted two of them the right to apply for asylum but rejected the appeal made by the third.

The Justice Ministry said the February ruling could set a precedent for future asylum seekers and make South Korea a destination for foreigners hoping to avoid military service in their own countries.

The ministry's decision to block the men's application and appeal the court decision, the ministry said, had been based on prior rulings by South Korea's Supreme Court as well as international legal norms.

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