



Uncertainty for K-Pop band after failed ultimatum

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Uncertainty for K-Pop band after failed ultimatum

[Banzai Japan Music Video](#)

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The future of K-Pop band NewJeans is in doubt, after they went public with complaints against their record label.

The girl group debuted in 2022, and quickly became a crossover hit, thanks to a 90s club sound, which recalled the heyday of TLC, SWV and En Vogue.

But two weeks ago, the quintet hosted a surprise livestream on YouTube, where they spoke for almost half an hour about their dissatisfaction with their record label, Hybe, and the decision to remove their producer, Min Hee-jin, from her role.

The group even issued an ultimatum, demanding that Min should be reinstated by 25 September. As the deadline ran out, Hybe rejected the request, putting a question mark over New Jeans' next move.

The band are committed to a seven-year contract, which runs out in 2029, but have signalled their unwillingness to continue under the current arrangement.

The K-pop news site Koreaboo [estimated that the band would have to pay about 300 billion South Korean Won, external](#) (about £170 million) to terminate the contract early.

It's a highly unusual story in the tightly-controlled world of Korean pop, where artists' moves are micromanaged down to the tiniest details.

NewJeans' decision to speak out came after months of internal wrangling at Hybe, one of South Korea's biggest entertainment companies, which the members said had left them "anxious" and "in a state of shock".

How did the NewJeans drama begin?

NewJeans were put together between 2019 and 2022 by by ADOR, a subsidiary of Hybe Corporation, under the direction of the label's CEO Min Hee-Jin.

The group's five members – Danielle, Haerin, Hanni, Hyein and Minji – were appointed through a mixture of auditions and traineeships, with Hanni and Minji making an early appearance in the video for BTS's single Permission To Dance.

Their name was chosen a play on the phrase "new genes" – intended to evoke the idea of a new generation of pop, as well as their devotion to street fashion.

Still teenagers when they released their debut single, Attention, in July 2022, they became an instant hit. Their self-titled debut EP went straight to number one in Korea in 2022, as did the follow-up, OMG.

In 2023, they scored five hits on the US chart, and were named group of the year at the Billboard Women In Music Awards.

The boardroom drama began this April, when Hybe announced it was auditing ADOR and Min-Jee Hin.

The Korea Times [reported, external](#) that the audit included searches of computers within ADOR's offices in Seoul.

Hybe subsequently accused Min of corporate espionage – saying she had planned a hostile takeover with outside investors, so that she could manage New Jeans and ADOR independently.

“The evidence included detailed discussions that Min has ordered the ADOR management to find ways to pressure Hybe into ultimately selling ADOR's shares,” the company said in a statement.

Min denied the allegations and claimed Hybe was retaliating after she'd complained that another of the label's acts, ILLIT, had copied NewJeans' identity, styling, choreography and music video concepts.

The CEO was granted a court injunction in May, which prevented Hybe from sacking her. But in August, ADOR announced she was standing down.

Initial reports stated that Min would continue to work as a producer for NewJeans, but she later announced she had rejected that offer, saying that Hybe's terms were “unreasonable”.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJsGZL-zb54>

How did NewJeans react to Min's departure?

After Min's departure, NewJeans members Hanni, Minji and Danielle spoke to fans on the NewJeans community app Phoning about their frustration and disappointment.

“I was so frustrated with myself for not being able to solve anything,” Minji said, according to [Korea Joong-An Daily. , external](#).

“I am so sorry that we're going through this unnecessary trouble when there's already not enough time in the day to focus on the good things.”

The band continued their promotional activities, however, including the launch of a lucrative new campaign as the faces of Calvin Klein.

But on 11 September, the same day they were nominated for two MTV Awards, they took the unprecedented step of setting up their own YouTube channel and posting a 27-minute long video entitled “What NewJeans Wanted To Say.”

Dressed mainly in black and reading a pre-prepared statement, the five-piece accused Hybe of fostering a toxic work environment and demanded Min's reinstatement.

In the video, which has since been deleted, 18-year-old Haerin said that videos of the members as trainees, as well as their private medical information had been leaked. She claimed that Hybe “did not resolve the issue nor did it take any proactive measures”, despite being made aware of the situation by the girls’ parents. (Hybe has not responded to the claim).

Hanni, 19, also alleged that the manager of another girl group at Hybe had instructed its members to “ignore her” when they crossed paths at the company’s headquarters.

NewJeans concluded by setting a deadline of 25 September for Min’s reinstatement – although they did not specify what action they would take if thire demands were not met

“What we want is the original ADOR, where CEO Min Heejin integrates management and producing. The reason we are sharing this is because we believe this is the only way to avoid conflict with Hybe,” they said.

“If our message has been properly conveyed, we hope Chairman Bang [Si-Hyuk] and Hybe will wisely restore ADOR to its original state by the 25th.”

[Banzai Japan Music Video](#)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3syHHGzkF_s

Why did Hybe reject NewJeans’ request?

On 25 September, Hybe [issued a statement, external](#) to the Korea Herald, saying it would not honour NewJeans’ request.

However, Ador said Min could continue as both an internal director at Ador and NewJeans’ producer.

“The board has resolved to convene an extraordinary shareholders’ meeting to reappoint Min Hee-jin as an internal director,” Ador said in an official statement.

“However, the board cannot accept the request for her reinstatement as CEO at this time. Min Hee-jin’s role and authority as the producer for NewJeans are fully guaranteed, and further discussions on specific terms will take place in the future.”

The K-pop agency also claimed it had “made an offer to Min Hee-jin to stay on as the producer of NewJeans for the next five years, which is the whole duration of the girl group’s contract”, adding that it is “look[ing] forward to talking through the detailed conditions of the deal in the future”.

What happens next?

It is unclear whether the band will accept the new arrangement, which Hybe presumably hopes will be seen as an acceptable compromise.

However, the band have yet to comment on the deal; and Min immediately issued a press release, once again requesting her reinstatement as CEO to ensure the continued success of her artists.

Korean media have suggested that, if NewJeans choose not to accept Hybe's terms, that they might try to "find legal grounds for contract violations" to get out of their deal, or even "pay a substantial penalty to terminate their contract".

K-Pop fans are watching with bated breath.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RR8YYeb4PMk>

Banzai Japan Social Media



Fumi Fujisaki

Idol



Riko Ueno

Idol

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Rino Ibusuki

Idol



Yunagi Nino

Idol



Shiori Fujisaki

Idol

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Kana Ichinose

Idol



Hoshino Arice

Idol



Sasa Sasagawa

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Kosaka Yuu

Idol



Tsukumo Aira

Idol



Maika Ando

Idol

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Yuuki Mochimaru

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