

NORTH KOREA: North Korean police restrict citizen movements across country

Radio Free Asia (30.03.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2mV0E4m> – North Korean police have started to strictly control the movement of residents and throw those without proper documents into detention facilities as they try to fill a gap in monitoring residents' activities neglected by state security agents, sources inside the authoritarian country said.

The country's Stasi-like secret police have been trying to control North Koreans following the regime's purge of Kim Won Hong, the agency's minister, who was expelled from office in mid-January on charges of corruption, abuse of power, and human rights abuses, they said.

Five senior officials from Kim Won Hong's office were reportedly executed by anti-aircraft gunfire after they were charged with submitting false government reports that are said to have enraged dictator Kim Jong Un.

Police have issued an order prohibiting the movement of residents throughout the country as of April 1, a source from North Pyongan province told RFA's Korean Service.

"The order says that people who have gone abroad for business trips or important matters must return to their residences by the end of March," he said.

The ban includes the prohibition of movement on April 5 when North Koreans hold memorial services to honor their dead parents and ancestors with Korean food, he said.

The detention facilities and waiting rooms in police stations are filled with people who were picked up for not carrying

their proper documents with them, the source said.

The police have said that the measure will be enacted in April to prevent unexpected incidents on April 15, the birthday of North Korea's founder Kim Il Song (1912-94), who is the grandfather of the country's current leader Kim Jong Un.

But he suggested that another motive was behind the recent move.

"I think the police have cracked down on the control of residents because they want to have the privileges that the State Security Agency used to have," he said.

The Changjin county incident

A source from South Hamgyong province told RFA that the beating death of the head of a family by police in Changjin county earlier this month for not having the proper certificate required for travel on business has outraged residents across the country, the source said.

In all, police arrested six Changjin residents for lacking travel certificates, some of whom were beaten to death, he said. They sent the wife of the man beaten to death to a labor camp, and their young child to an orphanage.

"News of the incident that occurred with Changjin county's police has been spreading throughout the country and has sparked the anger of residents," he said.

Central authorities have not taken any action against the officers, even though the families of those arrested have revealed the tyranny of the Changjin county police, he said.

"I think these incidents are occurring because central authorities handed over part of the power of the State Security Agency to the police ... [who are] taking control of judicial power, while the State Security Agency is struggling with the Kim Won Hong incident," the source said.

Citizens are becoming increasingly resentful of the police because of the harsh treatment they are meting out, he said.

With growing resentment, "the police will also eventually be in a similar situation as that of the State Security Agency, which is generally feared and hated by North Koreans," he said.

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JORDAN: Jordan on the brink of repealing law allowing rapists to marry their victims to escape punishment

Royal committee has recommended archaic legislation contravening women's human rights is abolished by parliament

By Bethan McKernan

The Independent (29.03.2017) – <http://ind.pn/2nMVgBi> – Women in Jordan are holding their breath in the hopes that King Abdullah II will repeal a law that allows rapists to walk free as long as they marry the survivor.

A royal judiciary committee recently recommended that Article 308 of Jordan's penal code – which shields rape, statutory rape and kidnap perpetrators from prosecution if they marry their victims- be abolished by the King, who heads both Jordan's judiciary and parliament.

The decision could come at any time.

Jordanian law currently says that rape is punishable by up to seven years in prison or capital punishment if the victim is aged 15 or under. The outdated statute, however, creates a loophole which suspends any criminal prosecution if the two people involved get married for a minimum of three years.

According to figures from Jordan's ministry of justice, 159 rapists avoided punishment by marrying their victims between 2010 – 2013, and 300 rapes were recorded annually on average during the same period – although activists point out the true figure is likely to be chronically underreported in a country where extramarital sex is taboo.

In extreme cases, women in Jordan who report rape can be murdered in so-called 'honour killings'.

"It's 2017. How can a rapist be allowed to go free and at the same time make a girl or a woman's life living hell?" Suad Abu-Dayyeh, feminist campaign group Equality Now's Middle East and North Africa Consultant said over the phone from Amman.

Equality Now has worked with Noor – a pseudonym – who at the age of 20 became pregnant after being drugged and raped by her employer, a man in his 50s.

“I couldn’t tell my family what had happened. I cried and cried not knowing what to do... He tried to make me calm by saying I will marry you and he promised to go and ask for my hand. In order to make me more confident, he brought a piece of paper and we both signed on as a marriage contract,” she said.

While Noor was unwilling to marry her rapist, on realising she was pregnant she felt like she had no choice.

“With all the hatred I have in my heart, my family forced me to marry him so as to save the ‘family’s honour,’” she said.

“I married him and I moved to live with him with all the negative memories of rape and deception. I thought that my life with my baby might make me happy, but I was very wrong; my situation deteriorated. My only hope from marrying him was to make my baby safe.”

Noor, with legal counsel, has since filed for divorce from her rapist, but faces a battle in court to ensure the man legally recognises and accepts custody of their child.

“When a man is allowed to marry his victim, the circle of abuse can continue with further emotional trauma, attacks and neglect,” Ms Abu-Dayyeh said.

“She will be more exposed to domestic violence and sexual assaults, and is likely to have restricted movement and a lack of power in decision making.

“Meanwhile, the man is rewarded rather than punished for his actions.”

Similar marriage clauses are present in the law regarding sexual consent in many modern Muslim states. They are usually

hangovers from interpretations of Sharia, or religious law.

In recent years such loopholes have come under under intensified scrutiny, with protests aimed at getting the law changed in several countries across the Middle East – although Turkey abandoned attempts last year to pass a law that would have allowed men who had sex with underage children to be pardoned if they married the victim after the proposed legislation caused outrage both within the country and internationally.

Rape and sexual abuse affect nearly one billion women and girls over their lifetimes, UN data says.

Equality Now is hopeful that a repeal in Jordan will be another “positive example” for women’s rights in the region, Ms Abu-Dayyeh said.

In recent years, Morocco, Egypt and Ethiopia have closed similar legislative loopholes, and changes to the law are pending in both Lebanon and Bahrain.

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