

Indonesia set to penalise sex outside marriage

Insulting the president or state institutions will also be banned in criminal code overhaul

Indonesia's parliament is expected to pass a new criminal code this month that will penalise sex outside marriage with a punishment of up to one year in jail, officials have confirmed.

The legislative overhaul will also ban insulting the president or state institutions and expressing any views counter to Indonesia's state ideology.

Cohabitation before marriage is also banned.

Decades in the making, the new criminal code is expected to be passed on December 15, Indonesia's deputy justice minister, Edward Omar Sharif Hiariej, told Reuters.

"We're proud to have a criminal code that's in line with Indonesian values," he said in an interview.

Bambang Wuryanto, a lawmaker involved in the draft, said the new code could be passed by as early as next week.

The code, if passed, would apply to Indone-

sian citizens and foreigners alike, with business groups expressing concern about what damage the rules might have on Indonesia's image as a holiday and investment destination.

The draft has the support of some Islamic groups in a country where conservatism is on the rise, though opponents argue that it reverses liberal reforms enacted after the 1998 fall of authoritarian leader Suharto.

A previous draft of the code was set to be passed in 2019 but sparked nationwide protests.

Tens of thousands of people demonstrated at the time against a raft of laws, especially those seen to regulate morality and free speech, which they said would curtail civil liberties.

Critics say minimal changes to the code have been made since then, though the government has in recent months held public consultations across the country to provide information about the changes.

Some changes that have been made include a provision that could allow the death penalty to be commuted to life imprisonment after 10 years of good behaviour.

The criminalisation of abortion, with the exception of rape victims, and imprisonment

for "black magic", remain in the code.

According to the latest draft dated November 24 that was seen by Reuters, sex outside marriage, which can only be reported by limited parties such as close relatives, carries a maximum one-year prison sentence.

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, has hundreds of regulations at the local level that discriminate against women, religious minorities, and LGBTI people.

Just weeks after Indonesia chaired a successful Group of Twenty (G20) meeting that elevated its position on the global stage, business sector representatives say the draft code sends the wrong message about Southeast Asia's largest economy.

Clauses related to morality, she added, would "do more harm than good", especially for businesses engaged in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

The deputy justice minister dismissed the criticism, saying the final version of the draft would ensure that regional laws adhered to national legislation, and the new code would not threaten democratic freedoms.

A revised version of the criminal code has been discussed since Indonesia declared its independence from the Dutch in 1945. —

Reuters



ARTISTIC OUTLET: Flora Tan guides her son Jackie Zheng, 29, as he practises the accordion before performing with his band Star Kids, who like him are all adults with autism spectrum disorder, at a camp site at Beijing Eco Valley Smart Farm, in Beijing, China. Picture: REUTERS/TINGSHU WANG

'Music is their language': school gives autistic Chinese youth a voice

Almost three years of pandemic restrictions have been hard for 23-year-old Chinese villager Zu Wenbao, but thanks to Beijing-based Chen's Studio, music has become his saving grace.

Zu is one of about 14 million people in China who have autism spectrum disorder.

Despite laws to ensure the integration of people with autism, many in China know little about the disorder and support remains lacking, experts say.

Having autism meant Zu was unable to fit in at school or among other young people in his home village of Bei'an in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province.

All that changed when he began free music lessons at Chen's Studio, after the pandemic hit.

Zu, who is non-verbal, has since learnt to play the keyboard, and sings along with

Without music, without these lessons, he wouldn't have anything

the four other members of the Star Kids band, established by their teacher, Chen Shensi.

"Without music, without these lessons, he wouldn't have anything," said Zu's mother, Zhao Guorong, who travels with him every Sunday for two hours on three different buses from their home on the outskirts of Beijing so he can attend class. "Even though the kids tak-

ing music classes are younger than him and half his size, they all take care of him like he's their brother," she said.

China has passed several laws to ensure inclusion of people with autism, most recently in September to standardise diagnosis and intervention for young children. While support has improved over the past 20 years, millions of children still lack the behavioural therapy and educational support they need, experts say.

People with autism tend to find it difficult to get jobs, and Chen hopes he can change that by giving his students a way to earn a living: the Star Kids band has already performed several concerts.

"They might be able to make a living by being an artist," Chen said.

"To some degree, I think music might be their language." - Reuters



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The 09th Commemoration of Nelson Mandela's values of *Peace and Social Justice* in the year of Reverend John Knox Bokwe to be held as follows:

Day 1 (04 December 2022)
Event: Peace Walk and Candle Lighting
Venue: Ultra City / Cathedral
Time: 14h00 to 16h00

PHASE 2
Event: Imvuselelo
Venue: Nelson Mandela Museum, \ Bhunga Building, Corner Nelson Mandela Drive and Owen Street, Mthatha
Time: 16h00

Day 2 (05 December 2022)
Event: Formal Programme
Venue: Nelson Mandela Museum, \ Bhunga Building, Corner Nelson Mandela Drive and Owen Street, Mthatha
Time: 10H00am

PHASE 2
Event: Nelson Mandela Arts Festival
Venue: Nelson Mandela Museum, Corner Nelson Mandela Drive and Owen Street, Mthatha
Time: 14h00