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Leaked Iran hijab documents call for mobile courts and jail terms for celebrities

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2022 Iran protests



EPA

Many Iranian women are openly defying the dress code by going out on to the streets without a hijab

By Farnoosh Amirshahi

"Highly confidential" documents obtained by BBC Persian outline how Iran's government is trying to crack down on women who do not wear a hijab.

Two documents from April and May reveal the judiciary could set up "mobile courts" in public places like shopping malls to punish dress code violations.

They also show schoolgirls could face action by the education ministry and that celebrities could be jailed for up to 10 years for "promoting corruption".

Iran's government has not commented.

However, an Iranian newspaper that published a short section of one of the directives has been charged with publishing classified documents.

And some of the directives were included in the controversial "Hijab and Chastity Bill" that is currently being reviewed by the Guardian Council watchdog before becoming law.

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Iran's parliament passed the bill in September - a year after protests erupted over the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who was detained by morality police for allegedly not wearing her hijab properly.

Women burnt their headscarves or waved them in the air at the demonstrations against clerical rule, during which hundreds of people were reportedly killed in a brutal crackdown by security forces.

Although the unrest has subsided, a growing number of women and girls have stopped covering their hair in public altogether in open acts of defiance.

According to the leaked documents, Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi approved a series of directives aimed at coordinating action by the government and other entities to address the issue of women not covering their hair in public - several months before parliament began debating the hijab bill in secret.

Security services - including the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) intelligence service, the ministry of intelligence, and the Security Police - were granted extensive powers to implement those directives, they show.

Some of the directives state that:

- Police should "prepare the necessary documentation regarding schoolgirls who unveil" so that appropriate action can be taken through the education ministry
- Celebrities, influencers and bloggers who do not cover their hair, or who "encourage unveiling" on social media, should face the charge of "promoting corruption", which is punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi approved the directives included on two documents marked as "highly confidential"

In the past few months Iranians have noticed the presence of hijab enforcers at metro stations across the capital, Tehran.

The interior ministry and Tehran municipality have described them as "self-motivated forces that do not require a licence for their activities".

But the documents show that their presence is the result of a government decision, which has required planning and the allocation of resources.

The documents also emphasise the importance of "extensively filming and documenting the identity of those involved in unveiling", and indicate that hijab enforcers filming women and girls are affiliated to the security services.

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