

Chechnya Encourages Islamic-Style Customs

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Chechnya has asked state workers to dress conservatively, including headscarves for women and an Islamic dress code on Fridays, in its leaders' latest assertion of Muslim customs.

"We recommend that male state workers come to work in a suit and tie, and that women dress in a skirt below the knee and the appropriate headgear," Chechen government deputy head Magomed Selimkhanov told reporters.

On Fridays — the main day for prayers in Islam — employees of both sexes should observe "a traditional Muslim dress code," meaning covered arms and legs.

Selimkhanov said his "recommendation" was "purely advisory."

But Caucasian Knot news agency reported that he had signed a document stating that Muslim dress was "essential" for state workers.

The Kremlin relies on Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov to maintain relative stability

in Chechnya, site of two separatist wars since the Soviet collapse 20 years ago.

Analysts say that in return, Kadyrov is allowed to usher in his radical vision of Islam, and the Kremlin watches uneasily as central power yields to Islamic tenets in the region.

Here are past aspects of Islamic-style policies in Chechnya, which have been ordered by Kadyrov's government and religious authorities.

Several of the orders violate Russia's secular Constitution and spiritual leaders call some of them "sharia," in reference to Islamic law.

September 2010: Women without headscarves in the Chechen capital Grozny say they are barred by guards from festivities marking a new holiday in Chechnya to honor women.

August 2010: Many women complain they have been harassed by bands of men for not wearing headscarves in Chechnya. Some of the assailants said they were working under orders from religious authorities.

August 2010: Chechnya's mufti Sultan Mirzayev, the region's spiritual leader and a close ally of Kadyrov, orders that eateries shut for the holy month of Ramadan. Though it carries no legal weight, it is obeyed, residents and witnesses say.

July 2010: Kadyrov says in a state television interview that he was grateful to assailants who targeted women with paintball pellets for not wearing headscarves.

June 2010: Men dressed in camouflage, often worn by police and security officers in Chechnya, fire paintball guns at women without headscarves. Russian rights group Memorial said the assailants were policemen.

May 2010: Kadyrov tells French newspaper Le Figaro that sharia trumps Russian law in his native Chechnya.

December 2009: Vakha Khashkhanov, head of Chechnya's Center for Spiritual and Moral Education, which Kadyrov set up, tells Reuters in an interview that polygamy is allowed in Chechnya because it is in the Quran, Islam's holiest book.

2007: Kadyrov issues an edict, in direct violation of Russian law, that bans women from going bareheaded in state buildings such as schools, universities and ministries. Four years later, it is still strictly observed.

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