

Authorities Tighten Dress Code

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The authorities in Turkmenistan are clamping down on state workers who do not adhere to unofficial dress codes, say NBCentralAsia observers.

Secondary school principals have ordered all female teachers to arrive for work on September 1 wearing headscarves and a long traditional Turkmen dress with full-length sleeves, according to Centrasia.ru internet news agency reports last week.

A decree that bans all Turkmen from wearing jeans, shorts and mini skirts has been in place since 1994.

This May, the government discussed making the national dress code even stricter, although they stopped short of signing any official decrees.

However, local authorities enforce an unofficial dress code which goes further than the 1994 decree in many schools and the government is beginning to clamp down on other state employees as well.

In spring, the authorities banned all medical staff from wearing jewellery to work and introduced a uniform for national television centre workers - a long blue traditional Turkmen dress for women and brown trousers, a sleeveless jacket and skullcap for men.

NBCentralAsia observers say that the authorities are trying to assert themselves by exerting greater discipline over state workers.

A teacher from Abadan city in Akhal oblast, who wishes to remain anonymous, says that school administrations check to make sure that female teachers are wearing a high-collared dress that reaches their heels. Anyone caught breaking the code may be sacked.

"We dress however they want us to. It's silly to lose your job over something so stupid," said the teacher.

An NBCentralAsia observer in Ashgabat says that most teachers are not particularly bothered by the code because they tend to wear national dress anyway, but some Russian language teachers take exception.

"This is a secular state so why should I go to school wearing a headscarf?" said one teacher from Ashgabat.

Teachers are "deeply disappointed" that the authorities are focusing on what they wear rather than, for instance, raising computer literacy or phasing out classes on the Ruhnama, the personal philosophy of late president for life Sapurmat Niazov.

(NBCentralAsia draws comment and analysis from a broad range of observers across the region.)

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