

# After sex video, South Korea accused of targeting gay soldiers

By Kim Tong-Hyung  
The Associated Press

**S**EOUL, South Korea — A watchdog group says South Korea's army is hunting down and prosecuting gay servicemen after a video of two male soldiers having sex was posted on the internet earlier this year, stoking fear in an already persecuted minority group.

Military investigators looking into the case have threatened soldiers to out their gay peers, confiscated cellphones to check communication records, and even used dating apps to dupe soldiers into revealing their sexual identity, said Lim Tae-hoon, the head of the Military Human Rights Center for Korea, which tracks abuses in the armed forces.

South Korea's army says it's conducting a proper criminal investigation into soldiers allegedly involved with filming and uploading the video, which is a violation of the country's communications laws and a military penal code that makes homosexual activity punishable by up to two years in prison. The army has denied allegations that investigators are using the case to embark on a broader mission to weed out gay soldiers.

"Military investigators used the information they gained from the investigation on the sex video to track down other gay soldiers in the army, starting by forcing the suspects to identify who they had sex with and then widening their search from there," said Lim, who said a soldier tipped his group off about the alleged crackdown.

In conservative South Korea, gays, lesbians, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people are harshly stigmatized and struggle to be politically visible, while a powerful Christian lobby immobilizes



**ARMED-FORCES ABUSES.** South Korean army soldiers walk to take their trains at the Seoul Railway Station in Seoul, South Korea. A watchdog group says South Korea's army is hunting down and prosecuting gay servicemen after a video of two male soldiers having sex was posted on the internet earlier this year, stoking fear in an already persecuted minority group. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

met the soldier who uploaded the video and he was arrested for allegedly obstructing the investigation by delaying his appearance for questioning due to his lawyer's schedule. The captain's lawyer could not be reached for comment.

Lim's group in 2014 uncovered the bullying death of a 21-year-old army conscript, a case that shocked the nation and led to calls for the Defense Ministry to take serious steps to reduce bullying and hazing in the military.

The army didn't provide details of its investigation into the video, including the number of soldiers being investigated or why the captain was arrested. It said in a statement that the investigation was proceeding legally and that the privacy of soldiers was being protected.

The army also stressed that homosexual activity in the military is banned to allow soldiers to maintain "sound and healthy private lives."

"The army will continue to deal with activities that disrupt the discipline of troops based on related laws," the army said in a statement.

South Korea's stance runs counter to that of the United States, which maintains bases in the country and is its largest ally. In 2011, the U.S. repealed its policy, known as "don't ask, don't tell," which banned open homosexuality in the military. It now allows service members to reveal they are gay without fear of investigation or discharge.

politicians seeking to pass anti-discrimination laws. That stigma is amplified in the military, where most able-bodied South Korean men are required to serve about two years as the country maintains a large force in the face of potential conflict with North Korea.

Gay men are not exempt from conscription but are banned from engaging in homosexual activity while serving, leading to an environment in which they serve without revealing their sexual identity for fear of discrimination and reprisals.

"South Korea's military doesn't exclude gay men from compulsory duty, but once they enter the military, they are seen as dangerous and treated as potential criminals, as the ongoing army investigation shows," said Han Ga-ram, an openly gay human-rights lawyer.

He said the investigation had "touched off fear in the LGBT community."

"Hate crimes against LGBT people are already a serious problem, and the government could make it worse by sending the wrong message by punishing gay men in the military," Han said.

The army doesn't reveal information about how often it pursues cases against gay soldiers, but Lim said in the five years before 2017 he knows of only two cases where soldiers were prosecuted for homosexual activity. Since the start of the year, more than 30 soldiers have come under investigation and one has been arrested, an army captain who did not know the soldiers involved, Lim said.

"The soldiers who are being investigated had sex with their partners under mutual consent and not inside the barracks," Lim said. "The army has infringed on the realms of privacy and is falsely claiming that these soldiers committed wrongdoings."

Lim said the arrested captain had never

## Smartphone app lets user 'walk a mile in a refugee's shoes'

By Eileen Ng  
The Associated Press

**K**UALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — The United Nations has helped launch a smartphone app that allows users to "walk a mile in a refugee's shoes" by simulating the daily struggles of a fictional Rohingya Muslim who was forced to flee her home.

The "Finding Home" app, developed by the advertising firm Grey Malaysia, allows users to simulate the phone of

"Kathijah," a fictional 16-year-old who fled persecution in Myanmar (also known as Burma) and is trying to make a new life in Malaysia.

Users essentially take over Kathijah's phone, answering her calls and texts and scrolling through her photos. In one scenario, she receives a message from her brother Ishak back in Myanmar.

"Kat, r u safe?" the message says. "It was a raid, they found us. Had to run."

Richard Towles, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative in Malaysia, said he hopes the free app will help people empathize with refugees.

"The refugee story is often a deeply personal one and difficult for people to understand," Towles said. "We hope that this application will allow a viewer to walk a mile in a refugee's shoes in order to understand what they go through every day in order to find safety."

There are more than 150,000 asylum seekers and refugees in Malaysia, one of the highest numbers in Asia, according to UNHCR. About a third of them are ethnic Rohingya Muslims, identified by the U.N. as one of the world's most persecuted minorities, who are denied

## Japan minister resigns over remark about 2011 tsunami

By Mari Yamaguchi  
The Associated Press

**T**OKYO — Japan's disaster reconstruction minister has resigned over his remark that "it was good" that the March 2011 quake and tsunami had hit northern Japan instead of areas closer to Tokyo.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe accepted Masahiro Imamura's resignation.

Imamura was replaced by Masayoshi Yoshino, former deputy environment minister from Fukushima, which was also hit by radiation leaks from a tsunami-hit nuclear power plant. Nobody died from radiation, but overall, the tsunami and the quake killed more than 18,000 people across northern Japan.

Imamura's resignation came a day after he made the remark in a speech at a ruling party reception, which Abe



**EMPATHETIC APP.** Izarra Azuddin, a staff member of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), displays the application "Finding Home" on her smartphone during a launch at UNHCR headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The refugee agency and a Malaysian firm recently launched the app aimed at raising public awareness and empathy about the worldwide struggle of refugees. (AP Photo/Daniel Chan)

citizenship by Myanmar and chased off their land in repeated outbreaks of communal violence.

"The refugee crisis is everywhere, yet we are inevitably desensitized to it as it has been going on so long," said Grey's creative director, Graham Drew.

also attended.

"It was good that (the disaster) hit the Tohoku region, up there. There would have been massive, enormous damage had it occurred closer to the capital region," Imamura said, according to Kyodo news.

Imamura immediately retracted the comment and apologized, but Abe's face reportedly froze.

Imamura came under fire earlier in April over his outburst and a suggestion during a news conference that those who left voluntarily following the meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear plant should fend for themselves.

His blunder is the latest in a string of remarks and scandals that have plagued Abe's government in recent months, prompting opposition lawmakers to step up their effort to weaken Abe's grip on power.

In March, Abe's reconstruction adviser, who was criticized for having his underling carry him on his back to hop over a puddle while visiting a flooded town, resigned after making a joke about rubber boots.

Imamura's predecessor faced an allegation that he stole female underwear. Also in April, a trade vice minister was forced to quit over an adultery scandal.

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4		6			1
	2	7			
5			8	2	
	6	4			3
	7				6
	2		1	8	
		5	3		7
			8	9	
	8		4		6

Difficulty level: Hard

#46127

**Instructions:** Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue's puzzle

Puzzle #56727 (Medium)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

1	4	2	7	5	6	8	3	9
6	5	9	1	8	3	4	7	2
7	8	3	9	4	2	6	1	5
2	1	6	8	3	7	9	5	4
3	9	4	2	6	5	1	8	7
5	7	8	4	1	9	2	6	3
9	6	5	3	2	8	7	4	1
8	2	1	5	7	4	3	9	6
4	3	7	6	9	1	5	2	8

