



HUNGRY GHOST FESTIVAL. A Chinese opera actor performs at a makeshift theater during the Hungry Ghost Festival in Hong Kong. Countless hungry and restless ghosts are roaming Hong Kong, and the world, to visit their living ancestors, at least according to Chinese convention. In traditional Chinese belief, the seventh month of the lunar year is reserved for the Hungry Ghost Festival, or Yu Lan, a raucous celebration marked by feasts and music. (AP Photo/Kin Cheung)

Hong Kong's Hungry Ghost Festival appeases restless ghosts

HONG KONG (AP) — Family members burn paper money over open flames on sidewalks. Chinese operas are performed in makeshift theaters under tents set up in neighborhoods. All to appease spirits in what is known as the Hungry Ghost Festival.

It is traditional Chinese belief that in the seventh month of the lunar calendar, the ghosts and the living occupy the same space as spirits wander restlessly to visit

their living ancestors.

Associated Press photographer Kin Cheung documented the Hong Kong tradition, revealing the scenes at makeshift altars and tents as people paid tribute to the spirits of their ancestors with food, candles, and music.

It is believed that the gates of the afterlife are open during the festival celebration, which began in mid-August.



SALT-FARM SLAVERY. A man walks through a salt farm on Sinui Island, South Korea, in this April 3, 2014 file photo. A court has ruled that the South Korean government must pay 37 million won (\$33,000) to a man who was held as a slave on a salt farm for several years and stopped from escaping by police. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man, File)

Court orders South Korea to compensate former salt-farm slave

By Kim Tong-Hyung
The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The South Korean government must pay 37 million won (\$33,000) to a man who was enslaved on a salt farm for several years and was stopped from escaping by police, a court has ruled.

But the Seoul Central District Court rejected the compensation demands of seven other former salt-farm slaves, saying the government's responsibility over their cases was unclear.

More than 60 slaves, most of them with intellectual disabilities, were rescued from remote islands off South Korea's southwestern coast following an investigation led by mainland police in 2014.

The Associated Press documented some of their stories in a yearlong investigation.

Dozens of farm owners and job brokers were indicted, but no police or officials were punished despite allegations some knew about the slavery.

Choi Jung Kyu, one of several lawyers representing the plaintiffs, said the lawyers will discuss with plaintiffs and their guardians before deciding whether to appeal. Lawsuits against the government over human-rights abuses are rarely successful in South Korea, where the burden of proof in non-criminal cases is

entirely put on the plaintiffs, who often lack information or resources.

The eight plaintiffs had sought a combined 240 million won (\$213,000) in compensation from the government, saying that official negligence and police inaction prolonged their ordeals. The man who received compensation had escaped a salt farm in Sinui Island and sought the help of police, who instead called the farm owner to the station to take him back.

Most of the salt-farm slaves rescued in 2014 had been lured to the islands by "man hunters" and job brokers hired by salt-farm owners, who would beat them into long hours of backbreaking labor and confine them at their houses for years while providing little or no pay.

The slavery was revealed in early 2014 when two police officers from the capital, Seoul, came to Sinui disguised as tourists and pulled off a clandestine operation to rescue one of the slaves who had been reported by his family as missing. That man's compensation claim was rejected.

One of the Seoul police officers who rescued the man told The AP they went undercover because of concerns about collaborative ties between the island's police and salt-farm owners. Local officials admitted to failures in properly monitoring the working and living conditions at the farms.

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