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Brunei to bring in tough new sharia law

Oil-rich sultanate plans a new Islamic criminal code with punishments including stoning, flogging and amputation

The Guardian (22.10.2013) - [Brunei](#) plans to implement a tough new sharia criminal code next year that could see citizens stoned for adultery or having a limb amputated for theft.

Those convicted of drinking alcohol or committing other violations – such as abortion – could be flogged.

Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah – who is thought to be worth about \$20bn (£12.3bn) and exercises tight control over the Muslim-majority country – described the legislation as "part of the great history of our nation" and a form of "special guidance" from God.

"It is because of our need that Allah the Almighty, in all his generosity, has created laws for us, so that we can utilise them to obtain justice," the 67-year-old was [quoted as saying](#) in local media.

The oil-rich sultanate already forbids the sale of alcohol and bans the evangelism of religions other than [Islam](#). It is known for practising a more conservative form of Islam than its majority-Muslim neighbour Malaysia.

While sharia law already exists within the small south-east Asian nation – which is home to roughly 406,000 people, two-thirds of whom are Muslim – the Islamic court has, to date, primarily handled family-related affairs like marriage and inheritance.

The new penal code will be enforced in phases, local media reported, and will apply only to Muslims.

However, visitors to the Brunei could be flogged under existing secular laws for crimes including immigration offences. Caning is also used as punishment in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore.

Brunei – which also calls itself the "abode of peace" – has seen an increase in crime in recent years, with courts dealing with petty robberies, drug trafficking, fraud and prostitution.

Many in the country seem to welcome the new legislation, with many taking to social media to write "long live the sultan" and "praise be to Allah". Human rights activists denounced the move as "feudal" and "abhorrent".

Brunei's leading Islamic scholar described the sharia code as "guarantee[d] justice for everyone".

Mufti Awang Abdul Aziz told a legal conference on Tuesday: "Let us not just look at the hand-cutting or the stoning or the caning per se. It is not indiscriminate cutting or stoning or caning. There are conditions and there are methods that are just and fair."

He said that tourists should not fear the new legislation as long as they were law-abiding.

"Do all potential tourists to Brunei plan to steal? If they do not, then what do they need to fear? Believe me when I say that with our sharia criminal law, everyone – including tourists – will receive proper protection," he said.

The sultan – who has reigned since 1967 and lives in an 1,800-room palace – also implied that those outside Brunei would do better not to judge the adoption of the new code.

"We view others ... without any form of prejudice," he said. "In return, we also have the right to expect that others will view Brunei in the same light."
