

Homosexuality fine on Russian city

Moscow, February 03: A city legislature in a central Russian town has approved a bill that will penalise people with fines for promoting homosexuality.

The bill, pushed by the pro-Kremlin United Russia party, was backed by 28 out of 35 deputies in Kostroma town's legislature.

A similar ban is already in place in the southern Astrakhan and central Ryazan regions but it was shelved in St. Petersburg, Russia's second city, last November after MPs failed to agree on its "legal definitions".

The legislation effectively outlaws any gay pride events while allowing authorities to impose fines of up to 50,000 rubles (\$1,600) for "public activities promoting homosexuality (sodomy and lesbianism), bisexuality and transgender identity" as well as pedophilia among minors.

The promotion of "religious sects" is also punishable by fines.

Five gay rights activists were detained after staging a protest in Kostroma last December.

The authorities insist the ban is "aimed at preventing sex crimes against minors".

But Igor Kochetkov, head of the St. Petersburg LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) group Coming Out, said it "strongly resembled" 1930s Stalinist repression.

Homosexuality was illegal in the Soviet Union and was only decriminalised by President Boris Yeltsin in 1993, but anti-gay sentiment is still widespread.

Kochetkov said rights groups planned to appeal the legislation.

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