

Environment watchdog urges probe into violent breach



Yixiang Textile Company [File photo]

China's top environment regulator has urged local authorities to bring those responsible for violence against law enforcement agents in eastern Anhui Province to justice.

On March 12, four law enforcement officers were attacked and injured while gathering evidence of unauthorized production at a textile company in Dangshan County, the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) said Sunday.

The company did not pass environmental impact assessment, the MEP said, calling for a fast investigation and "severe punishment" for the violent obstructors.

Its violation of environment laws should also be dealt with strictly, MEP added.

The watchdog will keep its zero tolerance for breach of law and high pressure of law enforcement, according to an official with the MEP's Bureau of Environmental Supervision.

[This unprecedented warning from trusts is a new low for this Government's mishandling of our NHS – Jonathan Ashworth MP](#)

Commenting on the warning from NHS Providers that frontline NHS services face “mission impossible” in meeting next year’s targets, Jonathan Ashworth MP, Labour’s Shadow Health Secretary, said:

“This unprecedented warning from trusts is a new low for this Government’s disgraceful mishandling of our NHS.

“Theresa May has downplayed the worst winter crisis on record, in which nine out of ten hospitals were dangerously overcrowded, and ducked her responsibility to patients by failing to provide significant funding in the Spring Budget.

“Years of damaging Tory neglect have left the NHS unable to deliver on its constitution and yet ministers remain in denial of the crisis they have created.

“The public now expects urgent and immediate action to provide patients with the world-class, 21st Century health and social care system they truly deserve.”

[Update on Scotland Gas Networks works](#)



I asked Scotland Gas Networks (SGN) about progress with their work in the Perth Road/Glamis Road area – particularly as residents have queried how long the temporary traffic lights on Perth Road at Farington Terrace will continue.

SGN's Team Manager has advised :

"We are currently completing the final phase in Perth Road. In order to maintain gas supplies we have to carry out the work in stages which unfortunately sometimes means returning to areas we worked in earlier in the project which obviously doesn't look good to members of the public.

The programme now is to complete all work in Perth Road next week, at the same time we are also working at the Glamis Road/Ninewells Avenue junction which should also be complete next week. Following this, and dependent on the Scottish Water works, we will then return to the Glamis Road/Blackness Road roundabout with traffic lights and the final piece of the project is a road crossing on Glamis Road at Elliot Road which may also need traffic control."

[Press release: Greater protection for rape victims and children at risk of grooming](#)

- Victims of sex crimes will soon be able to have their cross-examination pre-recorded before trial
- Rollout of the scheme to be fast-tracked and will now begin in September
- New offence of sexual communication with a child will also be introduced
- Groomers face up to two years in prison and will be automatically placed on the sex offenders register

New measures that will spare rape victims the trauma and inconvenience of attending court hearings will be rolled out across the country from September.

Victims of rape and other sex crimes will have their cross examination evidence pre-recorded and played during the trial.

Originally the rollout was not due to begin until next year but will now start in September after Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss and senior judges agreed to accelerate the scheme.

Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss said:

Attitudes to sex crimes and victims have changed beyond all recognition in our lifetime, and rape prosecutions are now at record levels.

With more victims now finding the confidence to come forward, I am determined to make their path to justice swifter and less

traumatic.

This will not reduce the right to a fair trial, but will make sure victims of these abhorrent crimes are protected and able provide their best possible evidence.

Work to rollout pre-recorded evidence for child victims of sexual offences has already begun. That followed a successful pilot that showed child victims felt less pressure giving pre-trial evidence and were better able to recall events.

This led to more early guilty pleas, fewer cracked trials and victims reporting a more positive experience of the court process.

The law already includes protections to ensure that questions – including previous sexual history – can be deemed inadmissible. The rollout of pre-recorded evidence offers further protection, as questions can be edited out of the recording if barristers flout these rules.

The move comes ahead of the Second Reading of [the Prisons and Courts Bill](#) tomorrow (20 March 2017) which included additional measures to protect vulnerable witnesses.

In criminal courts the Bill paves the way for more virtual hearings which means more vulnerable victims can give evidence away from the court room and without having to meet their attacker face to face.

While in family proceedings the government will give courts the power to ban the appalling practice of letting domestic violence abusers interrogate their victim in court. The Bill will bring family courts into line with criminal courts, which have had the power to stop this for some years.

The Justice Secretary also announced today that she is acting to bring in a new offence of sexual communication with a child, with adult groomers facing up to two years in prison and being automatically placed on the sex offenders register.

The new offence will come into effect on 3 April 2017, and will cover both online and offline communication, including through social media, e-mail, and letters.

Ms Truss said:

In a world of mobile phones and social media, our children are ever more vulnerable to those who prey on their innocence and exploit their trust.

This new offence will help to us tackle the early stages of grooming, and nip in the bud those targeting children online or through text messages. My message is clear – any sexual communication with a child could see you behind bars.

1. The three Section 28 pilot schemes for children and adults with a mental or physical disorder took place in Liverpool, Leeds and Kingston-upon-Thames crown courts.
 2. Rape prosecutions are at record levels. Recent statistics show that:
 - Rape prosecutions rose to 3,900 in 2015 – up 9% since 2014, up 36% since 2005, and the highest number prosecuted in the last decade.
 - The number of rape convictions reached 1,300 in 2015 – up 11% since 2014, up 63% since 2005, and the highest number convicted in the last decade.
 - Average sentences for rape also rose by over three years since 2005, reaching 117.9 months in 2015.
 3. On 3 April 2017 we are bringing into force section 67 of the Serious Crime Act 2015. It will be a criminal offence for anyone aged 18 or over to intentionally communicate with a child under 16, where the person acts for a sexual purpose and the communication is sexual or intended to elicit a sexual response. The offence applies to online and offline communication, including social media, e-mail, texts, letters, etc.
 4. There are a range of offences already available to deal with sexual communication, depending on the circumstances, but many do not automatically attract sex offender registration. The Justice Secretary made enacting this clause a priority and has acted decisively to ensure children are protected from online grooming.
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The doctrine of the mandate in Scotland

In September 2014, less than 3 years ago, 2m Scots voted to stay in the UK, and just over 1.6m voted to leave. It was a convincing result. It was a once in a generation question, as the SNP agreed at the time.

Since then the SNP has never gathered anything like as many votes as the Independence campaign secured. The SNP managed 1.45 million in the General Election of 2015, and only 1.05 million in the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections. There is no evidence in either of those votes of more people deciding to back the SNP because they wanted to change their minds from the Independence referendum itself. It is difficult to see why the SNP argue their subsequent polling justifies asking the public again after such a short passage of time to re run the Independence referendum. It is interesting that since the referendum the SNP have not managed to get a significant number of their referendum supporters to back them again.

Mr Brown has decided to have another go at the argument over Independence and devolution, just as he did in 2014 and when in office. He labours under one simple misapprehension. Offering Scotland more and more devolved power he thinks will end the pressure for independence. The opposite seems to be the

case. The more power the Scottish Parliament is given, the more the SNP demand. They were quick to dismiss his arguments yesterday when he blurted onto the airwaves. Mr Brown may believe it when he claims he saved the Union by getting Mr Cameron to offer yet more devolution. From my memory of the campaigns, it was the absence of good answers from the SNP to how the money would work out, and which currency they would be using, that helped persuade a majority to say No to the SNP offer. If every time the SNP demand more powers the Union Parliament grants them, you should expect the SNP to go on asking for more. It is also better than having to be accountable for exercising the powers they do have, as they can always try to claim that they need the extra powers to be able to achieve something.

There does not seem to be any amount of authority that leads to the SNP saying they will now get on with using the powers they have got for the betterment of Scotland.