

**Wary of protests, Dubai says watching social media**

407 words  
17 August 2011  
19:14  
Reuters News  
LBA  
English  
(c) 2011 Reuters Limited

DUBAI, Aug 17 (Reuters) - Dubai is monitoring social media sites for signs of attempts to organize protests or strikes, a police official said Wednesday, citing the large foreign labourer population as a concern.

Colonel Abdul Rahim bin Shafi, director of the Interior Ministry's organised crime department in the United Arab Emirates city, said Dubai police were closely monitoring social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

"Who ever spreads false or malicious news or statements or spreading propaganda which could upset public security could spend between one month to three years in jail," bin Shafi told Reuters Wednesday.

"All media are being monitored, including social media. People can express their opinion without violating (social) norms," he said. "Twitter and Facebook were invented to make the world easier but if they were used adversely, the perpetrators will be punished by law."

He said security chiefs in the UAE, a seven-member federation that includes Dubai and top oil producer Abu Dhabi, noted how social media was used by looters in Britain this month to organize their movements during riots.

"What happens in Britain could happen here," bin Shafi said, pointing to the expatriate worker population. "There is continued evaluation at the level of heads of departments and police chiefs to follow up on events and analyse them."

Some 80 percent of the UAE population is white- and blue-collar foreigners, many from Asia. Asian labourers, mostly from the Indian subcontinent, have staged strikes in the past over low wages and bad conditions.

"We have contingency plans to handle strikes and we have training programs to tackle such situations," bin Shafi said.

UAE security forces have clamped down on an increasingly vocal circle of activists who campaigned for democratic reforms in the UAE, whose emirates are dominated by dynastic tribes and allied trading families.

They arrested at least five activists who are being tried in Abu Dhabi on charges of insulting the country's leadership and incitement. The government has increased the number of Emirati citizens eligible to vote in elections to the advisory Federal National Council next month.

Last year, the UAE threatened to suspend BlackBerry services over access to encrypted email and messaging services. It later reached a deal with the Canadian smartphone maker in which Research In Motion complied with its regulations.

(Reporting by Mahmoud Habboush, editing by Andrew Hammond)

EMIRATES-SOCIAL MEDIA/POLICE

Document LBA0000020110817e78h000qy