



## BTS star to begin S Korea military service next month



The oldest member of K-pop phenomenon BTS will begin his military service on December 13, becoming the first in the band to enlist, local media reported Thursday. All able-bodied South Korean men under the age of 30 must perform about two years of military service, mainly because the country remains technically at war with nuclear-armed North Korea. That means the age cut-off is approaching for 29-year-old Jin, senior member of the hugely popular septet. He will begin his mandatory five-week training at Yeoncheon in Gyeonggi province before being deployed to a "frontline unit", the Yonhap news agency reported, citing military and industry

sources. The singer had previously hinted on social media that he had been assigned to the front line.

The news left fans overwhelmed and emotional, with some even expressing concern about Jin's safety. "My heart literally dropped when I read that he will be deployed to the front line," one fan tweeted, adding: "This military thing that surround BTS for years NEVER really concerns me until now. Why front line?? Why???"

Another fan said: "I can't help but think they're sending him to the hardest scariest place as punishment." BTS are credited with generating billions for the South Korean economy, and their label enjoyed a surge in profits despite holding fewer

concerts during the coronavirus pandemic. But the prospect of mandatory military service has long hovered over the K-Pop superstars, and has triggered years-long debate in South Korea over whether they deserved exemptions—which are given to classical musicians and Olympic medalists, for example. Their agency announced last month that band members would carry out their mandatory military service, starting with Jin. Seoul's defense minister had said in August that BTS might be allowed to continue performing and preparing for international concerts even while undertaking military duties. —AFP

## Interactive play gives Spain teens insight into gender violence

The row started with something minor: 'Edu' was laughing at something on his phone but refused to show it to his girlfriend 'Ali'. She got upset and they started arguing. Angry words turned into shouting and insults and suddenly a furious 'Edu' grabs her phone and hurls it to the classroom floor where it shatters, the violent gesture shocking the group of watching teenagers. The confrontation between the two characters, played by actors, is part of a play by Teatro Que Cura (The Healing Theatre) visiting a high school in the town of Parla near Madrid to raise awareness about domestic violence.

November 25 is International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and in Spain, which passed Europe's first law against it in 2004,

experts agree education is key to reducing the problem. In May, official figures showed gender violence was growing fastest among the under-18s, with the number of female victims up nearly 30 percent from 514 in 2020 to 661 in 2021. It was unclear if this was due to an increase in violence or a rise in the number of incidents reported.

The play at El Olivo high school starts with the couple getting ready for their first date, Edu winning over the 15- and 16-year-olds with a humorous monologue worrying over his looks, what to wear and his chances of getting laid. But the laughter dies as their relationship develops and the teenagers are encouraged to reflect on their arguments and what they would do differently. "The aim is to help adolescents build relationships based on equality



Susana Martin Cuezva, a therapist who directs El Teatro Que Cura (The Healing Theatre) reacts in an interview after an interactive play to raise awareness about domestic violence among teens.

and prevent domestic violence," says Susana Martin Cuezva, a therapist who directs Teatro que Cura and moderates the discussions. "The idea is that the students experience a situation of tension or conflict in the here and now and that they resolve it in a different way to how the actors are approaching it, which is always through violence."

### 'Pretty realistic'

"It's good to show it like this. If you see it in the street, it's just a couple fighting. But seeing it in this context you realize it is actually violence and that you can do something about it," says 15-year-old Patricia Garcia. As the plot develops, the audience is invited to voice their thoughts directly to Edu or Ali, with each actor improvising a response. "I lost my head, I'm not really like that," Edu explains to a student after the phone-smashing incident.

"Yeah right. First, give me some



Spanish actors Ana Merchante (left) and Manu Chacon play a scene during interactive theatre by El Teatro Que Cura (The Healing Theatre) to raise awareness about domestic violence among teens, at El Olivo high school in Parla, south of Madrid. —AFP photos

space and don't try to intimidate me," she says calmly. As he starts arguing, she walks off to cheers and applause from the students. What affected Mario Carmona, 16, most was the insults and the pushing and shoving. "Unfortunately, it was pretty realistic, and it happens more often than you'd expect," he told AFP. "It's not easy to understand what's happening even though these arguments are pretty normal. But it's good to have someone to support you, who can give you a wake-up call if things get a bit out of hand."

Set up in 2017, Teatro que Cura uses interactive theatre to immerse teens in dramatised scenarios of inequality and violence to raise awareness about conflict and gender-based violence. Over the past five years, they have worked with some 9,000 teenagers aged 14-19, mostly in the Madrid region. Studies show education is crucial, with a 2021 Spanish government report finding sex

education classes focused on equality and violence "reduce the risk of resorting to gender-based violence in boys, and of suffering it in girls".

### 'Detecting cases of risk'

"Adolescents who are taught about gender-based violence are at less risk," educational psychologist Maria Jose Diaz-Aguado told El Pais newspaper. "If you get this sort of education at school, you can become aware of such things much earlier," agreed 16-year-old Maryam Calderon. Silvia Serrano Martin, El Olivo's school psychologist, said the sessions were very effective. "It's really helped raise awareness about domestic violence because seeing it in such an experiential way reaches them more directly," she told AFP. "This is a useful prevention tool but it's also good for detecting cases of risk." —AFP



Teenagers play during interactive theatre by El Teatro Que Cura (The Healing Theatre) to raise awareness about domestic violence among teens.

## Swiss look to trains to get ski tourism on track



Switzerland is banking on the train to bring young European holidaymakers into the Alpine country during the forthcoming ski season, the national tourism agency said Wednesday. Switzerland Tourism is hoping to lure in winter sports enthusiasts in their 20s and early 30s through targeted train offers. "The emphasis is on train travel from European cities," with ski lift passes at reduced prices for "those who take the train", the agency said, calling it the "most sustainable way possible to get to the slopes".

During this year's summer season, landlocked Switzerland benefited from the return of foreign tourists thanks to the lifting

of COVID-19 restrictions. Hotel night bookings, however, were six percent below their pre-pandemic levels for January to October this year.

But for the 2022-23 winter season, Switzerland Tourism expects the number of hotel nights to exceed the 2018-19 season by one percent. The agency is counting on foreign tourists returning to the slopes, but acknowledged that the ski season was opening up facing "major challenges". These include energy costs, inflation, the strength of the Swiss franc, recession worries, and broader fears about climate change shortening the winter season in the mountains. —AFP

