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## Spain to overhaul sexual assault law, strengthen victims' rights

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Madrid.—Spain's government is poised to toughen legislation against sexual violence to bolster victim rights and improve the state's response to such crimes, government sources said yesterday. Calls to reform the relevant section of the penal code have been growing in the wake of a string of high-profile trials, including the so-called "Wolf Pack" case in which an 18-year old girl was gang-raped during Pamplona's annual bull-running festival.

The main change proposed by the new law would be to classify all non-consensual sex as rape, according to a report by Spanish news website eldiario.es, which cited a draft of the

proposed bill. Government sources reached by Reuters and speaking on condition of anonymity confirmed the accuracy of the eldiario.es report but insisted the text is only a draft. Aggravating factors such as physical violence or the use of drugs or alcohol to incapacitate the victim would carry heavier sentences, while such cases would be heard by special judges in courts dedicated to sexual crimes, as is already the case with crimes relating to gender violence.

Under Spain's current laws, the perpetrator must have used physical violence or intimidation for an assault to be classified as rape.

● Branson's Voyages line will target younger tourists with spas, a gym, 20 restaurants, DJ sets, drag queens and a running track. Children are not allowed.



# BRANSON'S CRUISE VISION

**NEW VESSEL WILL BE A REGULAR VISITOR TO THE PORT OF PALMA**

London.—British entrepreneur Richard Branson heralded his first cruise ship *Scarlet Lady* yesterday as targeting a younger generation of holidaymakers with a range of attractions that he believes will outweigh any fears around coronavirus. The ship will be a regular visitor to the port of Palma from next year.

Despite the unfortunate timing, with passengers on one ship quarantined in Japan after hundreds caught the virus and another turned away by five countries over fears someone on board may be ill, Branson sees cruises as a growth area. In an event at Dover, southern England, to promote the first of a planned four-strong fleet, the 69-year-old said Virgin Voyages' ships would offer a boutique hotel-type design with a festival environment, complete with sundeck yoga, a tattoo studio and vinyl records store. Branson told

Reuters *Scarlet Lady* would be based in the United States and Caribbean and then later the Mediterranean meaning he did not expect it to be hit by any fallout from the coronavirus crisis. The virus originated in mainland China and has killed more than 2,000 people.

"Obviously what happened in Japan was horrendously unfortunate," he said. "(But) I think the longer-term impact will be negligible. I think the fact that we're going out of America means that I don't think we'll suffer. People are booking as much as they've ever booked right now."

Branson, one of Britain's best-known businessmen, launched his career in the 1970s in records before expanding into airlines, banking, TV, healthclubs and space.

He has worked with Tom McAlpin, chief executive of Virgin Voyages and an industry veteran who previously ran the Disney

Cruise Line, to develop a service he says will have a lower environmental impact than most. Virgin Voyages says it is one of the first cruise lines to use Climeon, a technology that generates electricity from the heat of the ship's engine to reduce demand for fuel, and will also purchase carbon offsets.

Single-use plastics are banned, and it is shunning buffets, leading to less food waste as well as avoiding the "staid" imagine of formal cruise dining. "We will be the first fleet that is going to be carbon-neutral from day one," McAlpin said.

He also believes the industry will bounce back.

"If you look at the industry and how resilient it has been in the past, when there's been challenges, it has come back quite rapidly," he said. "We're doing everything we can, taking precautions above and be-

yond." Demand for cruising holidays has leapt over the past decade, with some 32 million passengers expected to set sail in 2020, a figure that has almost doubled since 2009. The United States is the biggest market for passengers, with the Caribbean and Mediterranean the most popular destinations for the leading 55 cruise lines that are led by Carnival, Royal Caribbean and Norwegian.

Like other Virgin brands, Branson's Voyages line will target younger tourists with spas, a gym, 20 restaurants, DJ sets, drag queens and a running track. Children are not allowed. He is starting with four ships but could expand further.

"We have one advantage which is that with Virgin we've got millions and millions of people who use our products," Branson said, adding he had never previously wanted to go on a cruise ship.