

Moroccan-Italian jailed for 'insulting Islam' to walk free

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Mon, 2021-08-23 23:20

RABAT: A dual Moroccan-Italian citizen jailed for three and a half years for "insulting Islam" will walk free Monday after a court gave her a suspended two-month jail term, a rights group said.

"She will be leaving prison Monday evening," a member of Morocco's Association of Human Rights in Marrakesh, Omar Arbib, told AFP.

The 23-year-old woman was arrested in June at Rabat airport when she arrived from France and sentenced later that month to three and a half years in jail. The Marrakesh appeals court on Monday overturned the sentence, handing her a suspended two-month jail term, Arbib said. A fine of almost \$6,000 euros was also scrapped.

She was convicted for "insulting Islam" after sharing on Facebook Arabic phrases imitating an extract from the Qur'an "without knowing the content because she is not fluent in Arabic," her father said at the time.

Legal proceedings began after a religious association in Marrakesh submitted a complaint against her.

Article 267 of Morocco's penal code stipulates a sentence of between six months and two years in prison for the offense of "insulting Islam," but the penalty increases to a maximum of five years if the offense is committed in public, including via electronic platforms.

Rome welcomed the news of the court's decision, with Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio thanking Italian diplomats and European Affairs Undersecretary Enzo Amendola for their work on the case, Italian news agency ANSA reported.



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Spain starts returning Moroccan minors after Ceuta migration crisis
Italian-Arab literary magazine aiming to 'revitalize culture between Med shores'

[**Boris Johnson and Joe Biden agree on Kabul evacuation efforts**](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Mon, 2021-08-23 22:03

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and US President Joe Biden agreed on Tuesday to work together to ensure all those eligible to leave Afghanistan were able to, including after the initial evacuation phase ended, Johnson's office said.

“They discussed the ongoing efforts by the UK and U.S. to coordinate the rapid and safe evacuation of our nationals and those who previously worked with our governments from Kabul International Airport,” a Downing Street spokesman said after the two leaders spoke by phone.

“The leaders agreed to continue working together to ensure those who are eligible to leave are able to, including after the initial phase of the evacuation has ended.”



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Taliban say Afghan resistance force ‘besieged’ in Panjshir Valley

[Chad to halve its troops fighting Sahel militants](#)

Mon, 2021-08-23 01:30

N'DJAMENA: Chad has decided to recall half of its 1,200 troops battling

militants in the tri-border area of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, a spokesperson for the Chadian authorities said.

Chad deployed the soldiers in February to support a France-backed regional fight with insurgents linked to Al-Qaeda and Daesh who have destabilized swathes of territory in West Africa's Sahel region in recent years.

The decision to withdraw 600 of these soldiers was taken with the agreement of Chad's Sahel allies, Gen. Azem Bermandoa Agouna said, speaking on behalf of the Transitional Military Council in Chad. The recalled Chadian troops would be redeployed elsewhere, Agouna said.

The authorities in Chad have faced a separate conflict this year with insurgents in the north.

France has also said it plans to reduce its presence in the Sahel to around half the current level of some 5,100 soldiers, although it has given no time frame.

BACKGROUND

Chad deployed the soldiers in February to support a France-backed regional fight with insurgents linked to Al-Qaeda and Daesh who have destabilized swathes of territory in West Africa's Sahel region in recent years.

The former colonial power has hailed some successes against the militants in recent months, but the situation is extremely fragile with hundreds of civilians killed in attacks.

Mahamat Idriss Deby, who leads the Transitional Military Council, has run Chad since his father, the former president, was killed while visiting the front line in April.

Earlier in August, Deby invited the rebels to participate in a national dialogue.

A military source said the 600 troops would be sent to Chad's northern border with Libya and Sudan to disarm rebels seeking to return to take part in these talks, which are scheduled for the end of the year.

On Saturday, Deby said the talks would not succeed unless all stakeholders were represented.



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Macron announces Sahel troop drawdown, calls for new force
Chad calls for world support as Sahel summit gets underway

[Suicide attacker targets checkpoint at Libyan desert town](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-08-23 01:37

BENGAZI: A suicide bomber attacked a checkpoint into the Libyan town of Zella on Sunday, killing himself but causing no other casualties, a spokesman for the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA), which controls that area, said.

Libya has endured a decade of violence and chaos since the 2011 uprising against Muammar Qaddafi, but there have been only sporadic attacks by militant groups in recent years, mostly in remote desert areas.

Zella is a small oasis town in the desert south of Sirte located near an

oilfield of the same name.

LNA spokesman Ahmed Mismari said the attacks bore the hallmark of Daesh.

In a separate development, authorities said mains water was being restored to western Libya after a week-long cut prompted by sabotage threats from loyalists of a jailed Qaddafi-era official.

“The wells and pumps are being switched back on to gradually restore supply,” the authority said on its Facebook page on Saturday. “The crisis is over.”

FASTFACT

Zella is a small oasis town in the Libyan desert south of Sirte located near an oilfield of the same name.

The announcement brought welcome relief to Libyans forced to cope without water as a summer heat wave gripped North Africa.

The water authority is responsible for a huge network of pipelines, dubbed the Great Man-Made River, which was one of the major projects of Qaddafi during his four decades in power.

It brings water from underground aquifers deep in the Sahara desert to settlements on the Mediterranean coast.

Last weekend, the water authority shut down the pipeline network in a bid to contain any damage, after loyalists of Qaddafi’s brother-in-law Abdullah Al-Senussi threatened to sabotage it unless he were released.

Senussi was sentenced to death in 2015 for his role in the attempted suppression of the 2011 uprising that toppled Qaddafi.

He remains in prison in Tripoli.



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Libya in peace push amid flurry of diplomacy in CairoUS envoy meets Libyan commander to push for elections

[Israel launches COVID-19 antibody tests for children as young as 3](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-08-23 01:10

TEL AVIV: Israel has launched antibody testing for children aged as young as three, seeking information on the number of unvaccinated youths who have developed protection against coronavirus ahead of the new school year. Despite surging daily infections caused by the highly transmissible Delta variant, Israel's government insists it wants to avoid the hardships and developmental setbacks caused by school closures.

Israel has already begun vaccinating children aged 12 and above.

The national serological survey is focused on pupils between the ages of three and 12 who are not yet eligible for the jab, nearly 1.5 million children.

It is aimed at discovering how many children developed strong antibody protection against coronavirus after having an unrecorded or latent case, according to the education ministry.

Those children with sufficient antibodies will not be forced to quarantine when exposed to a COVID-19 patient, a move aimed at limiting schoolyear disruptions.

In a statement on Sunday from the Jerusalem municipality announcing Israel's "largest serological operation," Mayor Moshe Leon urged parents to bring their children for the free 15-minute test done by finger pin-prick.

The survey is being conducted jointly by the health and education ministries and by the army's Home Front command, which told AFP on Sunday that its antibody testing operation had begun.

BACKGROUND

Israel was one of the first countries to launch a vaccination drive via an agreement with Pfizer to obtain millions of paid vaccine doses in exchange for sharing data on their effectiveness.

A pilot program conducted last week focused in mainly ultra-Orthodox Jewish

communities found that roughly a fifth of children had developed antibodies, army radio reported on Sunday.

Education Ministry director general Yigal Slovik said in a statement last month that last year's school closures caused "emotional and social damage" to students.

"The lockdowns and remote learning caused a 44 percent increase in referrals for suicidal risk diagnosis," among other impacts, he said.

Israel was one of the first countries to launch a vaccination drive in mid-December via an agreement with Pfizer to obtain millions of paid vaccine doses in exchange for sharing data on their effectiveness.

The inoculation campaign was hailed as a success story that helped drastically reduce infections, but Israel is again registering thousands of daily cases.

As it launches the serological survey, Israel is also pushing forward with vaccinations, offering a third, or booster, shot to everyone over 40 while urging the unvaccinated to get the jab.

More than 5.4 million of Israel's roughly 9.3 million people have received two doses of the vaccine, while 1.2 million have had a third jab.

Israel has recorded nearly 980,000 coronavirus infections since the pandemic started early last year, and over 6,700 deaths.



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