

Trial for murder of Scandinavian hikers to open in Morocco

Author:

Tue, 2019-04-30 22:33

RABAT: Two dozen suspects are set to go on trial in Morocco Thursday for offenses linked to the gruesome murder of two young Scandinavian hikers late last year that shocked the North African country.

Danish student Louisa Vesterager Jespersen, 24, and 28-year-old Norwegian Maren Ueland had their throats slit before they were beheaded in December at an isolated site in the High Atlas mountains.

Three main defendants accused of direct involvement in the murders and who allegedly pledged allegiance to Daesh could theoretically face the death penalty.

A total of 24 defendants are due to appear before a criminal court in Sale to answer charges including promoting terrorism, forming a terrorist cell and premeditated murder.

A Spanish-Swiss is among the suspects who are due to face justice in the city near Rabat. But families of the slain hikers and their lawyers will not attend the trial, according to information obtained by AFP.

Nature lovers, the two friends shared an apartment and went to Norway's Bo University where they were studying to be guides.

They had traveled together to Morocco for their Christmas holidays. Their lives were cut short in the foothills of Toubkal, the highest summit in North Africa, some 80 km from the city of Marrakesh, a tourist magnet.

After the bodies were discovered, the Moroccan authorities were initially cautious, referring to a "criminal act" and wounds to the victims' necks.

But that all changed when a video showing one of the victims being beheaded – filmed by one of the killers on a mobile phone – circulated on social networks.

The video did the rounds online in Morocco, Norway and Denmark.

Danish police said last month they had launched prosecutions against 14 people suspected of sharing the gruesome video.

A separate video in the initial aftermath of the murder showed the alleged killers pledging allegiance to Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, under the terrorist organization's banner.

Police quickly arrested a first suspect in the suburbs of Marrakesh, and three others were arrested a few days later when they tried to leave the city

by bus.

Aged from 25 to 33, all had struggled to get by in poor districts of Marrakesh.

They made a living from “small jobs” and were educated to a “very low” level, according to investigators.

Abdessamad Ejjoud, a 25-year-old street vendor referred to as the emir of the group by peers, is the suspected ringleader of the operational cell and a wider group he formed in Marrakesh, according to investigators. Twenty others are due to face justice in Sale for links to the alleged killers.



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Morocco arrests Swiss national in connection with killing of Scandinavians
Nine more arrested in Morocco over murder of Scandinavian tourists

US urges Russia to end 'escalation' in Syria's Idlib

Tue, 2019-04-30 21:01

WASHINGTON: The United States on Tuesday urged Russia to abide by its commitments and end an "escalation" in Syria's northwestern Idlib region after a monitor said air strikes killed 10 civilians.

"The violence must end. The United States reiterates that any escalation in violence in northwest Syria will result in the destabilization of the region," State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said in a statement. "We call on all parties, including Russia and the Syrian regime, to abide by their commitments to avoid large-scale military offensives, return to a de-escalation of violence in the area, and allow for unhindered humanitarian access to address the humanitarian disaster created by the ongoing violence," she said.

Idlib is under the control of a former al-Qaeda affiliate in one of the last areas that President Bashar al-Assad has not taken back in his ruthless, Russian-backed campaign to crush an uprising against his rule.

Russia and Turkey, which backs Syria's rebels, in September agreed to a buffer zone to prevent a potentially devastating offensive in Idlib and nearby regions which are home to some three million people.

But the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on Friday reported Russian air strikes in two towns that killed 10 people, including a boy and a girl. The monitor also blamed Moscow and Damascus for shelling of a medical center, which the UN humanitarian office called "completely unacceptable."

Violence has separately flared in Aleppo province, where the monitor said that jihadist groups killed at least 22 Syrian government troops and militiamen on Saturday.



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Attacks on Syrian health facilities condemned Russian 'siege' chokes Syrian camp in shadow of US base

[Russia's Putin, Turkey's Erdogan call for Libya cease-fire during telephone call](#)

Tue, 2019-04-30 20:18

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Tayyip Erdogan called for a ceasefire in Libya and renewal of a political process under the aegis of the United Nations during a phone call on Tuesday, the Kremlin said in a statement.

They also underscored further close coordination between Russia and Turkey aimed at "normalization" in Syria's Idlib province and agreed on "efficient" measures against militants there, the Kremlin said.

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[World's largest falcon hospital cares for UAE's heritage](#)

Mon, 2019-04-29 23:30

ABU DHABI: When a falcon in the Gulf Arab countries falls sick, the owners of these much-loved and expensive hunting birds know where to take them: The world's largest falcon hospital, in Abu Dhabi.

"It's their baby, they want the best for it," said hospital director Margit Muller, a German veterinarian with over 25 years experience in treating falcons.

"Sometimes when the falcons have an accident at night, the owners will sit

there for hours into the early morning.”

The birds are more than pets and the practice is more than a sport.

Falconry is an important part of the cultural desert heritage of the Arabs of the UAE and neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia going back thousands of years.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Falconry is an important part of the cultural desert heritage of Arabs going back thousands of years.
- The UAE issues falcons their own passports and the birds travel with their owners in airplane cabins, sometimes dozens at a time for specific hunting trips.
- Owners train their birds using meat and then fly them to countries like Pakistan, Morocco and the central Asian region during colder months.

“The Bedouin used falcons to hunt meat ... so the falcon was essential to ensure the survival of the Bedouin’s family,” said Muller. “(The birds) have always been considered like the children of the family and this remains until today.”

With flight speeds exceeding 300 km an hour, falcons can suffer serious injuries as they collide with prey, misjudge a landing or ingest infected meat.

The government-supported Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital is the world’s main center for falcon medicine, research and training. Its subsidised prices means people of all income levels can use its falcon care, Muller said.

“Nowadays falconry is one of the very few opportunities for the former Bedouin to reconnect to their past,” she said.

Falcons are recognized internationally as endangered and only captive bred falcons can be legally owned in the UAE.

Hunting in the UAE outside a few special reserves is illegal, so owners train their birds using meat and then fly them to countries like Pakistan, Morocco and the central Asian region during colder months.

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Saudi falconry festival adds another feather to its cap with new world record
Falcon breeding played key role in Arab world

[Sudan's military, opposition hold key talks](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-04-29 22:46

KHARTOUM: Sudan's military rulers and an opposition alliance met on Monday to discuss the powers of a joint military-civilian council to steer the country's transition after three decades of rule by Omar Al-Bashir, sources said.

The two sides had been due to talk about the makeup of the proposed body, but military officers who toppled Bashir on April 11 focused the discussions

instead on the future council's functions and powers, sources said.

A further meeting between the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and the Declaration of Freedom and Change Forces, an umbrella group representing opposition groups and activists, will be held to discuss the council's composition, they added.

The makeup of the proposed council is key because activists who organized 16 weeks of protests leading to Bashir's ouster have insisted that the body be civilian led. The TMC has not indicated that it is willing to cede ultimate authority.

The joint council would be the sovereign body overseeing a technocrat government and a legislative council.

On Sunday, protest leaders held talks with the military council after the army condemned an attack on an Islamist party close to Bashir.

Dozens of protesters on Saturday surrounded a building where the Popular Congress Party was holding a meeting.

The state-run SUNA news agency quoted party leader Idriss Suliman as saying that protesters attacked the party members as they left the building, wounding at least 64 people. The party was established in the late 1990s by Hassan Al-Turabi, the Sudanese leader who played a key role in the 1989 coup that brought Bashir to power. It is a symbol of the lingering power of Bashir's regime, which was built on a close alliance between the military and Islamists.

The deputy head of the military council, Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo – commonly known by his nickname Hemedti – accused the demonstrators of trying to set the building on fire. Security forces intervened to separate the two groups, he added, to avoid “a disaster.”

The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which spearheaded four months of overwhelmingly peaceful protests, condemned the violence.

The military has said it is open to “proportional” civilian representation in its council and the granting of executive powers to civilians. It has said it is consulting with all political factions except for National the Congress Party on the way forward.

Amjad Fareed, an SPA spokesman, said late Saturday the talks have focused on “the nature of the council, whether it is going to be a civilian council with some military representation or just military like the military council insists on. And how long is the transition process.”

Two activists within the SPA said both sides have reached an “initial deal” to share power in the transitional council. They said Sunday's talks would focus on apportioning representation between the two sides. Both activists spoke on condition of anonymity as the talks are ongoing.



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Sudan army agree to share power with civilians
Sudanese protesters demanding civilian rule meet with army