

Saudi Arabia court gives death penalty to man who renounced his Muslim faith

Man in his 20s likely to be publicly beheaded after ripping up copy of the Koran and hitting it with a shoe in ultraconservative kingdom Saudi Arabia



The man ripped up a copy of the Koran, and hit it with a shoe Photo: REUTERS

By Reuters

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An Islamic court in Saudi Arabia has sentenced a man to death for renouncing his Muslim faith, the English-language daily Saudi Gazette reported on Tuesday.

The man, in his 20s, posted an online video ripping up a copy of Islam's holy book, the Koran, and hitting it with a shoe, the newspaper reported.

Saudi Arabia, the United States' top Arab ally and birthplace of Islam, follows the strict Wahhabi Sunni Muslim school and gives the clergy control over its justice system.

Under the Wahhabi interpretation of Sharia Islamic law, apostasy demands the death penalty, as do some other religious offences like sorcery, while blasphemy and criticism of senior Muslim clerics have incurred jail terms and corporal punishment.

Executions in Saudi Arabia are usually carried out by public beheading.

International rights groups say the Saudi justice system suffers from a lack of transparency and due process, that defendants are often denied basic rights such as legal representation and that sentencing can be arbitrary.

The Saudi government has taken some steps to reform its judicial system but has also defended it as fair.

Last year a court in Jeddah sentenced Saudi liberal Raif Badawi to 1,000 lashes and 10 years in prison for publishing criticism of the kingdom's ruling religious and political elite and calling for reforms in Islam.

The first of 50 of those lashes were carried out in January, but subsequent rounds of flogging have not occurred. Officials have not publicly commented on the case, but insiders say the lashing appears to have been quietly dropped.

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