

2 Christian Monks Sent to Trial Over Killing Bishop

Two Christian monks have been sent to trial over the killing of a bishop in an Egyptian desert monastery last month, Alexandria's public prosecutor said on Sunday.

Wael Saad and Ramon Rasmi Mansour, known by their monastic names Isaiah al-Makari and Faltaous al-Makari, were referred to the Damanhour criminal court for alleged involvement in killing Bishop Epiphanius, 64, the abbot of Saint Macarius Monastery, some 110 km (70 miles) northwest of Cairo in Wadi Natroun.

Saad was defrocked this month over what church officials called violations of monastic life, and later detained. Judicial sources said he had confessed under questioning to killing the bishop. There has been no indication of a motive.

The second monk, Mansour, threw himself from atop the monastery in an apparent suicide attempt this month. He has been treated in a Cairo hospital where he has also been questioned as part of the same investigation, judicial sources told Reuters.

Sunday's prosecutor's statement said Saad had long had differences with his superiors, who had on one occasion investigated him for breaking monastery traditions.

It said Saad was accused of striking the bishop three times in the back of the head with a 90-cm (35-inch) steel pipe while Mansour stood guard outside.

Christians make up an estimated 10 percent of Egypt's roughly 96 million population.

Coptic Pope Tawadros this month ordered a freeze on accepting

new monks, a ban on monks leaving monasteries without permission, and a ban on clergy using social media. {eoa}

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