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LEAD Kiwi-Release
LORRAINE COHEN AND SON RELEASED

PULAU PINANG, June 29 (Bernama) -- New Zealander Lorraine Philis Cohen, 53, and her son, Aaron Shelton Cohen, 30, who were pardoned from life sentence imposed for drug offences, were released this morning.

They left the Pulau Pinang Prison at 9.22am and were whisked to the Bayan Lepas International Airport in a white car belonging to the Immigration Department.

They were put on a Malaysia Airlines flight to Kuala Lumpur at 11.30am. They will take an evening flight back to Auckland from the Malaysian capital, said their local lawyer, Karpal Singh.

"Both of them are very happy, very excited and looking forward to going home. They want to thank the Malaysian and the New Zealand governments for giving the assistance towards their release," said Karpal Singh who had been their counsel for the last eleven-and-a-half years.

"I think they should be left alone when they get back to New Zealand so that they can get on with their lives. In fact, my clients even joked that they will miss prison," he said, adding that Lorraine is a changed woman and she and her son are free of drugs now.

Mother and son, who had been in jail since Feb 9, 1985, did not speak to a large group of reporters covering their release, including four television crews from New Zealand.

Last May 25 the State Pardons Board pardoned the Cohens who were arrested on Feb 9, 1985 at the same airport.

Lorraine, a housewife, was sentenced to death by the High Court here on Sept 1, 1987 for trafficking in 140.7gm of heroin while Aaron was given life imprisonment and six strokes of the rotan for having 34.16gm of the same drug.

In August 1989, the then Supreme Court commuted Lorraine's death sentence to life imprisonment after amending the charge of trafficking to possession.

While serving the sentence, Lorraine underwent radiotherapy for cancer and had a mastectomy to remove her left breast at the Pulau Pinang Hospital in 1992.

Asked for his opinion on why the Cohens were pardoned, Karpal Singh said: "We did not expect the reprieve. I think Dr Mahathir Mohamad (Malaysian Prime Minister) wants to show that he is not as hard-hearted as he is made out to be."

Lorraine and Aaron, both looking pale, left with a luggage bag and a sling bag.

They are believed to have sold the rights to their story to a New Zealand women's magazine, said several New Zealander reporters who were covering their release.

Karpal Singh complained that it was wrong that the Cohens were not given the opportunity to speak to anyone and the manner in which they left was akin to deportation.

However, Lorraine had evaded and said "no, no" to questions from reporters including those from her country when they tried to interview her upon her arrival at the airport.

She is said to have two more sons and a daughter in Auckland. --
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