

Malaysia arrests Saudi blogger over Prophet Mohammad tweets
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 10 — Police have arrested a Saudi Arabian columnist who fled his country after making comments on Twitter deemed insulting to the Prophet Mohammad, prompting a surge of online outrage and calls for his execution.

File photo of a Twitter page displayed on a laptop computer. — Reuters pic
“It is confirmed that Malaysian police have detained the Saudi writer. This arrest was part of an Interpol operation which the Malaysian police were a part of,” a police spokesman told Reuters today.

He gave no further details and would not comment on whether the writer, Hamza Kashgari, would be extradited to Saudi Arabia, where some Islamic clerics have called for him to be put to death for his comments.

Malaysia is a majority Muslim country with a close affinity with many Middle Eastern nations through their shared religion. The Southeast Asian nation is also a US ally and a leading global voice for moderate Islam, meaning that any decision to extradite Kashgari certain to be controversial.

Blasphemy is a crime punishable by execution under oil-rich Saudi Arabia’s strict interpretation of Islamic sharia law. It is not a capital crime in Malaysia.

The 23-year-old Kashgari reportedly posted the comments on his Twitter feed to mark the Prophet Mohammad’s birthday on Saturday, drawing thousands of outraged comments on Twitter and other social networking sites.

Reuters could not verify Kashgari’s comments because he later deleted them, but media reported that one them reflected his contradictory views of the Prophet.

Kashgari later said in an interview that he was being made a “scapegoat for a larger conflict” over his comments.

“I view my actions as part of a process toward freedom,” Kashgari was quoted as saying in the interview with the Daily Beast website.

“I was demanding my right to practise the most basic human rights — freedom of expression and thought — so nothing was done in vain.” — Reuters

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