

Morocco upholds reporting convictions

CASABLANCA: The appeal court in Casablanca on Tuesday, 29 December 2009, upheld a four year suspended jail term for the chief editor of *Akhbar Al Youm*, Taoufiq Bouachrine, and cartoonist Khalid Gueddar, a judicial source said.

The court confirmed fines of 50,000 dirhams (€4,400 / \$6,400) against each of the journalists for "insulting the emblem of the kingdom." It also confirmed damages worth 270,000 euros.

On September 26, *Akhbar Al Youm* published a caricature of a member of the royal family, Prince Moulay Ismail, cousin of King Mohammed VI. The Moroccan government and courts are highly sensitive to press representation of the royal family.

Bouachrine and Gueddar were ordered to pay three million dirhams (€270,000) in damages and interests the prince, and the paper was ordered shut down definitively.

"I am disappointed by this ruling," Bouachrine said. "Moroccan justice is following the line laid down... by the ministry of the interior, which condemned us right from the start."

On Monday, an appeals court upheld suspended jail terms and fines handed down on two journalists who had reported that the king was sick.

Journalists in the north African country periodically find themselves in trouble with the courts for their handling of royal matters.

Source: AFP

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