

Swedish prosecutor drops rape probe against WikiLeaks' Julian Assange

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Stockholm: After almost seven years of investigation, Sweden's top prosecutor today said that the authority has decided to drop the inquiry into a rape charge against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

File pic of Julian Assange

In a statement issued here, the Swedish Prosecution Authority said that Marianne Ny "has discontinued the investigation" against the Australian computer programmer.

"Chief prosecutor Marianne Ny has today decided to discontinue the preliminary investigation regarding suspected rape concerning Julian Assange," the statement said.

Assange took refuge in the Ecuador embassy in London in 2012 to escape extradition to Sweden to answer questions about rape allegations by two women. He has been there ever since, fearing that if he is arrested he might ultimately be extradited to the United States.

WikiLeaks tweeted after the Swedish announcement, "UK refuses to confirm or deny whether it has already received a US extradition warrant for Julian Assange. Focus now moves to UK."

While the relief to Assange virtually paves way for him to walk free, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in London said that it remained obliged to arrest Assange should he leave the Ecuadoran embassy on a lesser charge of failing to surrender to a court.

The Metropolitan Police Service in London issued a statement saying that its actions had been based on a response to a "European Arrest Warrant for an extremely serious offence".

It went on: "Now that the situation has changed and the Swedish authorities have discontinued their investigation into that matter, Mr Assange remains wanted for a much less serious offence. The MPS will provide a level of resourcing which is proportionate to that offence."

The MPS said it would "not comment further on the operational plan".

Last month, US President Donald Trump had said that he will support any decision by the Justice Department to charge Assange.

Friday's announcement indicated that Assange is no longer under any investigation in Sweden.

The 45-year-old WikiLeaks founder was wanted in Sweden for questioning over a rape allegation stemming from a 2010 visit.

"This is a total victory for Julian Assange. He is now free to leave the embassy when he wants. We have won the Assange case. He is of course happy and relieved. He has been critical that it has lasted that long," Per E. Samuelsson, his lawyer in Sweden, said.

The development comes after Assange's lawyers demanded that Sweden drop his European arrest warrant.

He fears Sweden would extradite him to the United States to face trial for leaking hundreds of thousands of secret US military and diplomatic documents that first gained attention in 2010.

He had earlier made numerous appeals to Swedish courts, including the Supreme Court, but lost eight bids to cancel the arrest warrant.

- With AP Inputs