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## Grandma escapes hangman's noose

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## Judge agrees Australian was duped into smuggling drugs

**SHAH ALAM:** An Australian grandmother who said she was tricked into smuggling drugs into Malaysia after falling for an online romance scam, escaped the death sentence for trafficking.

In handing down his verdict at the High Court in Shah Alam, Justice Ghazali Cha accepted the defence's argument that Maria Elvira Pinto Exposto (*pic*) did not know the bag contained drugs and found her not guilty.

"I agree with the defence lawyer that the accused did not have knowledge about the drugs," he

said, adding that she was innocent.

The judge indicated Exposto would be deported from Malaysia.

Exposto was arrested in December 2014 at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) with 1.1kg of crystal methamphetamine stitched into the compartment of a backpack she was carrying.

The 54-year-old said she did not know about the hidden stash of "ice" and claimed that she had been fooled into carrying the bag after travelling to China to see someone she met online called "Captain

Daniel Smith", who had claimed to be a US serviceman.

After engaging in a long online romance, Exposto travelled to Shanghai to see "Smith".

But she did not succeed in meeting her supposed love interest while there and ended up being given a bag by a stranger, who asked her to take it to Melbourne.

When she arrived at KLIA to change flights, she mistakenly went through immigration as she was unfamiliar with the airport.

She voluntarily offered her bags for Customs inspection and the

drugs were discovered.

Malaysian lawmakers voted last year to amend legislation so that capital punishment, carried out by hanging, is no longer mandatory in drug-trafficking cases – but the changes have yet to come into force.

There are numerous people on death row in Malaysia, mostly drug offenders, but executions have been rare in recent times. — AFP



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