

Obama shortens WikiLeaks source Chelsea Manning's term, grants clemency to hundreds

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Washington: Outgoing US President Barack Obama on Tuesday commuted the prison sentence of Chelsea Manning, who had leaked scores of classified Army documents to WikiLeaks and is serving 35 years jail term, allowing her to go free nearly three decades early.

File pic - Chelsea Manning

According to the commutation granted, Manning will now be released on May 17 this year. The transgender soldier has been lodged in prison after being convicted in August 2013. She also attempted suicide twice last year.

She was sentenced to 35 years of imprisonment on charges of illegally obtaining and passing on the classified documents to WikiLeaks.

According to the White House, Manning's offences included one specification of wrongful and wanton publication to the internet intelligence belonging to the United States, five specifications of stealing, purloining or knowingly converting US government records.

It also included six specifications of wilful communication of information relating to the national defence, one specification of wilful communication of information in unlawful possession; and one specification of wilful communication of information relating to the national defence by exceeding authorised access to a US government computer.

The New York Times said the commutation also relieved the Department of Defence of the difficult responsibility of her incarceration as she pushes for treatment for her gender dysphoria, including sex reassignment surgery, that the military has no experience of providing.

Earlier in the day, the White House, however, ruled out a similar commutation to Edward Snowden, who is currently on a political asylum in Russia.

"Mr Snowden should return to the United States and face the serious crimes that with which he's been charged. He will of course be afforded the kind of due process that's available to every American citizen who's going through the criminal justice process," White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest told reporters.

"But the crimes that he's accused of committing are serious. We believe that he should return to the United States and face them rather than seeking refuge in the arms of an adversary of the United States that has their own strategic interests in disseminating information in a harmful way," he said.

While responding to a question about Manning, Earnest said, "However, Chelsea Manning is somebody who went through the military criminal justice process, was exposed to due process, was found guilty, was sentenced for her crimes, and she acknowledged wrongdoing".

Besides Manning, Obama also shortened the sentence of more than 200 inmates including Puerto Rican nationalist Oscar Lopez-Rivera. Obama also pardoned 64 people, including retired Gen. James Cartwright, who was charged with making false statements during a probe into disclosure of classified information.

- With AP Inputs