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Alliance Francaise boss caught with charas, sent back

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CHANDIGARH: The head of a prestigious French institution meant to promote cultural ties was quietly smuggled out of India after she was arrested in Himachal Pradesh with 250 gms of charas, a crime that could have sent her to jail for 10 years.

Isabelle Normand, the director of Alliance Francaise, Chandigarh, was arrested more than two weeks ago in Kullu, said sources in HP police. Cops found the contraband on her at the Bajaura checkpost on Kullu-Mandi highway on February 23.

Police said Normand first tried to conceal her identity. But when officers insisted on her arrest, she said she was part of a technical team from the French embassy in New Delhi, sources said.

Under the Narcotic and Drugs (Prohibition) Act, possession of over 100 gms of charas attracts a maximum punishment of 10 years of rigorous imprisonment.

Jagat Ram, who was Kullu SP at the time of Normand's arrest, said the French embassy was informed of her arrest. She was later produced in a court, which granted her bail.

Kullu SP K K Indoriya said Normand had left the country and the court could summon her whenever it wanted. French embassy officials in New Delhi confirmed that she had left for France after getting bail from the court.

"Normand is no longer heading Alliance Francaise, Chandigarh," French embassy's spokesman Alain Perrier told TOI from New Delhi on phone.

Perrier said he did not know if the French government or the embassy had taken any action against her. "All I can add is that a new director will take charge of the Alliance Francaise centre soon," he said.

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