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SC disposes of case seeking reinvestigation of Perween Rahman's murder

The Supreme Court on Monday disposed of the case seeking reinvestigation into the mysterious murder of director Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) Karachi and internationally renowned social worker Perween Rahman.

But before disposing of the case, a three-judge Supreme Court bench headed by Justice Umar Ata Bandial also ordered the Sindh police to file the two JIT reports, one headed by SSP Omar Shahid Hamid and the other headed by director FIA Baber Bakht Qureshi in the Anti-Terrorism Court No 13 at Karachi where five accused in the murder of Ms Rahman were facing trial. The reports should be filed within a period of two weeks.

The apex court also directed the trial court to proceed with the matter expeditiously in accordance with law.

The bench had taken up a case relating to the assassination of Ms Rahman, who was killed on March 13, 2013 in cold blood on the way home from her OPP office.

Orders Sindh police to file JIT reports in ATC within two weeks

Some unidentified assailants approached her car on a motorbike on the main Manghopir Road near the Banaras flyover and opened fire, as a result of which she received bullet injuries in her neck.

She was rushed to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital by her driver where she succumbed to her injuries and died.

Advocate Raheel Kamran Sheikh is representing Aquila Ismail, the sister of the slain Ms Rahman before the Supreme Court.

On Monday, the apex court also disposed of a review petition challenging the Sept 24, 2020 order whereby the trial court was directed to conclude the proceedings within one month.

Advocate Sheikh argued that the Sept 24 order was obtained in his absence by misleading the court as the investigation reports of the two JITs constituted pursuant to the orders passed in the petition were yet to be filed in the trial court and additional evidence was yet to be presented before the trial court. The counsel requested to order the trial court to conclude the trial otherwise the entire proceedings before the apex court in the last two years would be an exercise in futility.

Advocate Faisal Siddiqi in a connected petition while assailing the order passed by the Sindh High Court which had rejected an application by Aquila Ismail to summon members of the JIT as witnesses, argued that the high court did not entertain criminal revision but also restrained the trial court from passing the final judgement till decision of the high court.

Senior counsel and president SCBA Latif Afridi, while representing the accused in the trial, objected to the maintainability of the petition under Article 184(3) of the Constitution as well as intervention of the apex court in the matter of criminal investigation.

But the apex court asked the counsel what objection he had to the filing of the JIT reports to the trial court and continuation of the proceedings in accordance with law. The counsel however could not object and insisted on fixation of the time frame for the decision of the trial by the ATC.

The Supreme Court refrained from fixing any time frame, however, it directed the trial court that the orders passed by it for the protection of OPP staff will continue and allowed the petitioners to approach it if any occasion arises.
(By Nasir Iqbal Dawn, 13, 05/01/2021)

NGO plants 60 fruit tree saplings in Mazar-i-Quaid's peripheral area

Spring is an ideal time for planting flowers and trees. Shehri-Citizens for a Better Environment (CBE) welcomed spring in a befitting way on Saturday morning by planting 60 fruit tree saplings at the Mazar-i-Quaid.

The tree saplings included 20 each of beri, known also as ziziphus mauritiana, Chinese date or Indian jujube, imli or tamarind, and badaam or almond. They were planted as part of Shehri's million-tree campaign on the land adjacent to the Quaid Mazar Management Board (QMMB) where the NGO has been planting trees since April 2016 after their dispatching dumpers of soil mixed with manure to the site and digging pits for that fertile soil and tree saplings that were placed in them. They have also planted neem, gulmohar, jamun, jungle jalebi, kachnar, chikoo, pomegranate, guava and citrus fruit trees there.

‘You know beri or ber, as it is commonly known, is in season these days and you will be surprised to learn that at Rs250 per kilogramme it is even more costly than apples, which are Rs200 per kg,’ Amra Javed of the NGO, smilingly pointed out as she proudly walked one through the spacious lawns where so many of their earlier planted trees have started bearing fruit as well as providing shade.

‘Soon we will have lots of birds here as we are providing them the habitat. The beri, guava, almond trees will also beckon lots of green parrots,’ she said.

4,000 trees planted so far About the lawns, resident engineer and QMMB secretary Mohammad Arif said that the mazar grounds span 132 acres, of which 61 acres are where the actual mausoleum is built and 71 acres is the peripheral area plot where they have many trees planted by different people and organisations including Shehri-CBE.

‘We have some 4,000 plants here which also include the trees that late Ardeshir Cowasjee encouraged people to plant around 1994 through his Tree Mazar Committee,’ he said.

About how they water the plantation, the resident engineer said that they are also constructing a sewerage treatment plant so that there is always abundant water for watering the plants and trees.

‘The pipes have already been laid out for drip irrigation on the mazar side. We would also be able to provide one million gallons of water to the city from this treatment plant,’ he said.

Farrah Rahman, focal person, Clean & Green Karachi, and Jilani Yousuf of Rotary Club Karachi were also present on the occasion to support Shehri-CBE and planted trees along with their team.
(By Shazia Hasan Dawn, 13, 07/02/2021)

Perween Rahman had identified ‘land grabbers’ before murder, court told

Perween Rahman had identified and named “land grabbers and extortionists” for trying to illegally occupy the land of the office of the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) in an interview recorded around 15 months before she was allegedly killed by the same group.

This was disclosed in a supplementary charge sheet filed with the ATC-VII by the fifth joint investigation team constituted on the directives of the Supreme Court to probe the high-profile murder afresh.

Five accused — Abdul Raheem Swati, his son Mohammad Imran Swati, Ayaz Shamzai, aka Swati, Amjad Hussain Khan and Ahmed Khan aka Ahmed Ali aka Pappu Kashmiri — have been charged with murdering her.

The then OPP head was gunned down near her office in Orangi Town on March 13, 2013.

The victim’s sister, Aquila Ismail, had expressed dissatisfaction in the Sindh police and requested the apex court to order the federal government to constitute a JIT under the supervision of the Federal Investigation Agency.

During the hearing, DIG Police Babur Bakht Qureshi, the director of the JIT, supervised by the FIA’s Counter-Terrorism Wing, filed the supplementary charge sheet, stating that the JIT members had not only examined the already available record, but also probed the case with regard to suspected involvement of the water and land mafia in the killing of Perween Rahman.

Former head of OPP had been gunned down in Orangi Town in 2013

The JIT had also included politicians, journalists and land developers among the people interrogated during the course of fresh investigation, it added.

It had emerged that during an interview conducted by a freelance journalist, Fahad Deshmukh, Perween Rahman had mentioned having a dispute with the accused, Rahim Swati, who wanted to set up a karate centre on the land of the OPP office.

In the interview, Perween Rahman had called Rahim Swati a “land grabber and extortionist” and stated that the latter wanted to illegally occupy the land of the OPP’s office, the charge sheet stated.

It further stated that statement of journalist Fahad Deshmukh was recorded by the JIT under Section 161 of the criminal procedure code (CrPC), who said that he had known Perween Rahman whom he had met around thrice while he was working for the Express Media Group.

The journalist further said that he had interviewed Perween Rahman in the office of the OPP in December 2011, which was partially aired on “Public Radio International” of America in January 2012.

The journalist further said that he had once again shared the audio of the interview on social media after her assassination in 2013. Mr Deshmukh verified the contents of the interview, the charge sheet stated, adding that the (interview) audio was sent to a laboratory for forensic examination.

The charge sheet concluded that in light of the evidence and statements of the witnesses, it emerged that Perween Rahman was murdered by Rahim Swati and his accomplices.

JIT’s original reports submitted

During the hearing, DIG CTD Omar Shahid Hamid also appeared and submitted the original report of a JIT constituted under his supervision in 2018.

Separately, the investigating officer of the case Inspector Fariduddin also submitted original reports of three other JITs, which were constituted to probe the murder.

FIA assistant directors Rehmatullah Domki and Khalid Hussain Shaikh were also present.

The judge directed the office to keep the original reports of the JITs (in all five) in safe custody of the court.

He fixed the matter on March 20 for further proceedings and hearing on the JITs reports.
(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 13/03/2021)

Homage paid to I.A. Rehman at online reference

The Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (PIIA) on Saturday evening held an online reference to pay homage to journalist and human rights defender I.A. Rehman, who passed away in Lahore on April 12.

The first speaker was architect Arif Hasan. He divided his talk into three parts: his relationship with Rehman sahib, his personality and legacy. He said he met the late journalist and activist in Lahore in 1967 for the first time where he (Hasan) had gone to work. Although Rehman sahib was 12 or 13 years older than him, they would meet every evening where they'd be joined by the likes of Dr Mehdi Hasan and Nisar Osmani. Rehman sahib used to call the architect 'kitab'. Even after he returned to Karachi from Lahore, both kept meeting on a regular basis. Their relationship deepened when Bangladesh was trying to gain independence. Their ties further strengthened during Z.A. Bhutto and Gen Ziaul Haq's tenures.

On the second point, Mr Hasan said Rehman sahib was a good listener. He knew how to lend an ear to people. He would never interrupt anyone while they were talking, even when they would be presenting a point of view opposite to his. He never spoke ill of anyone. At meetings and seminars, he would give an opinion that differed from others' with a sense of humour. He never spoke about himself. Once, he visited his birthplace in Gurgaon, India. When he came back, nobody could detect an air of nostalgia in his narration about his place of birth. He talked about it like a tourist would. He was an extremely well-informed man who turned his wealth of information into knowledge (ilm).

Mr Hasan, speaking about his legacy, said Rehman sahib has left behind the institutions that he was associated with and founded; his efforts to bring peace between India and Pakistan; his resolve that we should not be afraid of speaking the truth; and the youngsters who in their small but significant ways have established human rights and social welfare groups.

'He was a good listener, and never spoke ill of anyone'

Executive director of PILER Karamat Ali said he had worked with Rehman sahib as a trade unionist and human rights activist. He had known him since 1971 when he visited Lahore with Sadequain. Rehman sahib at the time was looking after a newspaper, Azad. He (Ali) was deeply impressed with him from day one. After that he got to work with him at the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and alongside him on projects that aimed to bring India and Pakistan closer. Whichever country he visited, it seemed as if it was his own because people there would greet him with a great deal of warmth.

Mr Ali said Rehman sahib was like a father to him. On April 12, when he passed away, he (Ali) felt like an orphan. Speaking with him used to put him at peace. The late activist respected everyone's point of view.

Resident director Sindh, Aurat Foundation, Mahnaz Rahman said on April 12 she was at the Karachi Press Club (KPC) where an event was being held to mark the first death anniversary of journalist Ahfazur Rahman. There, the participants were in shock to receive the news of Rehman sahib's passing. In September last year, when a condolence reference was held for Ahfazur Rahman at the Arts Council, Rehman sahib came from Lahore and delivered the keynote address.

She said the news of Rehman sahib's death flooded social media with messages. She mentioned two of them. One was from an admirer of Rehman sahib who wrote that he's the 'father of human rights'. The second was from a woman activist who said that women always felt comfortable working alongside Rehman sahib because he understood women's issues. In that regard, she read out excerpts from an article by Rehman sahib which he wrote in favour of Aurat March.

Earlier, chairperson of PIIA Masuma Hasan introduced the speakers to the online audience. She also briefly talked about Rehman sahib, calling him the leading public intellectual of Pakistan.
(By Peerzada Salman Dawn, 13, 18/04/2021)

Judgement reserved on plea seeking testimonies in Perween Rahman murder case

An anti-terrorism court reserved its decision on Wednesday on an application seeking to record testimonies of important witnesses, including the law enforcement and intelligence agencies' officers, who had probed high-profile murder case of renowned rights activist Perween Rahman.

Rahman, who dedicated her life for development of impoverished neighbourhoods, was gunned down near her office in Orangi Town on March 13, 2013.

Five accused — Abdul Raheem Swati, his son Mohammad Imran Swati and three co-accused: Ayaz Shamzai aka Swati, Amjad Hussain Khan and Ahmed Khan aka Ahmed Ali aka Pappu Kashmiri — have been charged with the high-profile murder.

On Wednesday, the matter came up before the ATC-VII judge, who is conducting trial in the judicial complex inside the central prison, when the five detained accused were produced from the prison.

The judge took up an application filed by the complainant, Aquila Ismail, requesting the court to summon around 20 witnesses for recording their statements against the accused persons in the present case.

Her counsel, Salahuddin Panhwar, argued that the witnesses included the senior officers of the Inter-Services Intelligence, the Military Intelligence, the Intelligence Bureau, the Federal Investigation Agency, the Rangers and police.

He explained that these high-ranking officers were either heads or members of five joint investigation teams, constituted from time to time by the provincial and federal governments on the directives of the Supreme Court, to probe into the murder case.

“These officers’ efforts led to arrest of all the accused persons and they (officers) had also interrogated them (accused). Therefore, their testimonies are important to record,” Mr Panhwar added.

After hearing arguments, the judge reserved his verdict on the plea to be pronounced on May 24 and adjourned the hearing.

‘Land grabbers and extortionists’

In March, the fifth JIT report was filed with the court, revealing that Perween Rahman had named “land grabbers and extortionists” for trying to illegally occupy the land of office of the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) in an interview conducted by journalist Fahad Deshmukh aired internationally two years before she was allegedly killed by the same group.

The JIT’s head, DIG Babur Bakht Qureshi said that the team had not only examined the already available record but also probed the case with regard to suspected involvement of the water and land mafia in the killing of Perween Rahman.

“The team had interrogated politicians, journalists and land developers among the people interrogated during the course of fresh investigation into the case”, it had added.

The report stated that slain Perween Rahman in an interview aired internationally had mentioned having a dispute with the accused, Rahim Swati, who wanted to set up a karate centre on the land of the office of the Orangi Pilot Project.

In the interview, Perween Rahman had called Rahim Swati as “land grabber and extortionist” and stated that the latter wanted to illegally occupy the land of the OPP’s office, the report added.

The probing team concluded that in the light of the evidence and statements of the witnesses it had emerged that Perween Rahman was murdered by Rahim Swati and his accomplices.
(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 14, 20/05/2021)

Prosecution closes side in Perween Rahman murder trial

An antiterrorism court has recorded testimony of the head of a joint investigation team (JIT) constituted to re-investigate the Perween Rahman murder case.

Five accused — Abdul Raheem Swati, his son Mohammad Imran Swati and three co-accused, Ayaz Shamzai aka Swati, Amjad Hussain Khan and Ahmed Khan aka Ahmed Ali aka Pappu Kashmiri — have been charged with the murder.

Ms Rahman, who dedicated her life for development of the impoverished localities, was gunned down near her office in Orangi Town on March 13, 2013.

The JIT head appears in court and records statement as a prosecution witness

When the matter recently came up before the ATC-VII judge, who is conducting the trial of the five accused in the judicial complex inside the central prison Karachi, an official of the Federal Investigation Agency’s Counter-Terrorism Wing, Khalid Shaikh, produced a prosecution witness for recording his testimony.

The witness, Babar Bakht Qureshi, a director of the FIA who headed the JIT, recorded his testimony before the court, He produced two CDs, containing interviews of Ms Rahman.

The officer deposed that he had recorded statements of three witnesses of the case, including forensic and technical experts and a freelance journalist, under Section 161 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

He had recorded the statement of journalist Fahad Deshmukh, who had interviewed Ms Rahman in the OPP office in December 2012 for an international radio website.

The officer deposed that he had also recorded the statement of Muhammad Waqas, a technical expert with the FIA, who had downloaded the audios of the interview from the website and obtained original audio recordings of Ms Rahman’s another interview from Mr Deshmukh’s audio recording device.

The officer added that he had also recorded the statement of forensic expert Masood Ali, who had matched both the audios to check their genuineness, etc.

After his testimony, the prosecution closed its side.

The judge fixed the matter for July 5 for recording statements of the accused.

Earlier, the prosecution had provided a list of 15 to 20 witnesses to the court for recording their testimonies in the case.

The witnesses included the heads and members of three different JITs, which were constituted from time to time to investigate the high-profile murder case.

The trial court was directed to examine the officers of the JITs by the Supreme Court, where the victim's sister, Aquila Ismail, had approached seeking a fresh investigation by the FIA showing no confidence in the Sindh police's investigation.

According to the prosecution, some of the accused during interrogation had confessed to their involvement in the crime and disclosed that local leaders of the Awami National Party (ANP) had allegedly hired Taliban militants to kill Ms Rahman.

It added that Shamzai and Swati, who were said to be local leaders of the ANP, were living near the OPP office and allegedly tried to obtain a designated area to build a karate centre, but Ms Rahman refused to allow it.

The prosecution also said that all the accused persons were present in a meeting held in January 2013 at Swati's residence in which they planned Ms Rahman's murder, adding that they hired a local commander of the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Moosa, and Mehfoozullah aka Bhaloo for the murder.

Initially, a case was registered under Sections 302 (premeditated murder) and 34 (common intention) of the Pakistan Penal Code at the Pirabad police station.

Section 7 of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 was subsequently incorporated in the case on the basis of a judicial inquiry conducted by then district and sessions judge (west) Ghulam Mustafa Memon on the orders of the SC.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 21/06/2021)