



JHELUM, PAKISTAN: In this Monday, Sept. 5, 2016 photo, Pakistani police officers escort the detained father, second left face covered, and husband, right face covered, of slain British woman Samia Shahid, to appear in court. — AP

PAKISTAN COURT POSTPONES HEARING IN UK WOMAN'S MURDER CASE

JHELUM, PAKISTAN: A defense lawyer says a Pakistani court has postponed the hearing of the ex-husband and the father of a British woman who was murdered while on a family visit to Pakistan.

Mohammad Arif says the two were to appear on yesterday before the court in the city of Jhelum but the judge postponed the hearing until Saturday. The case is suspected to be the latest reported incident of so-called "honor killings."

The police have said the killing of 28-year-old Samia Shahid was a "premeditated, cold-blooded murder" and a government-ordered police inquiry has recommended that her ex-husband and her father be tried on charges of rape and murder.

Shahid was buried in July in eastern Pakistan after her family declared she had died of a heart attack. — AP

INDIAN COURT SENTENCES MAN TO DEATH FOR ACID ATTACK MURDER

MUMBAI: An Indian court sentenced a man to death yesterday for murdering a woman by throwing acid on her face after she rejected his marriage proposal, a decision applauded by the victim's family. Ankur Panwar was found guilty on Tuesday of hurling sulphuric acid on 24-year-old Preeti Rathi in a fit of jealousy outside a railway station in the financial capital Mumbai in May 2013. Rathi, who was a neighbour of Panwar's in New Delhi and had just arrived in Mumbai to start a new job as a nurse, died in hospital of multiple organ failure the following month. "The court has awarded the death penalty to Ankur Panwar. I convinced the court that the acid attack belonged to the rarest of rare cases," public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam told AFP.

'The rarest of rare'

The Supreme Court says capital punishment should only be carried out in "the rarest of rare" cases in India, among a dwindling group of nations that still have the death penalty on their statute books. Panwar's lawyer said they would appeal the verdict-delivered at a special court dealing with crimes against women-to the Bombay High Court, Mumbai's highest. "We are moving the case to the high court. There is no second thought about it," Apeksha Vora told AFP.

Police alleged Panwar, reportedly 26, and a hotel management graduate, had committed the crime out of jealousy after she rejected his marriage proposal and had wanted to disfigure her face to destroy her career. Nikam successfully argued that Panwar's attack had been pre-meditated. Vora had pleaded leniency for her client, saying that he was his family's sole breadwinner. —AFP

MALDIVES POLICE RAID NEWSROOM AFTER DOCUMENTARY BROADCAST

COLOMBO, SRI LANKA: Police in the Maldives have raided the office of one of the country's leading news websites shortly after a television documentary was broadcast that accused the country's president of corruption, money laundering and misrule.

Zaheena Rasheed, editor of Maldives Independent, said yesterday her offices were raided by the police who produced a court warrant over an alleged "conspiracy to topple the government." Police took away the security camera recordings and the computer hard drives in the raid on Wednesday. Rasheed was among those interviewed for the documentary aired by the Qatar-based Al Jazeera network. She left the country ahead of the broadcast. Maldives became a multiparty democracy in 2008 after decades of autocratic rule but President Yameen Abdul Gayoom has taken a stranglehold on power since his election in 2013. — AP

HEAVY FIGHTING AS TALEBAN PUSH INTO SOUTHERN AFGHAN CITY LATEST CITY TO BE TARGETED BY INSURGENTS

KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN: The Taliban stormed into Tarin Kot yesterday, triggering heavy fighting around government buildings as panicked residents scrambled to flee the capital of southern Uruzgan province, the latest city to be targeted by insurgents. Pitched battles prompted urgent calls from officials for reinforcements and air support, after the militants toppled security posts on the outskirts to breach the city gates. Residents said senior officials were abandoning government buildings and fleeing to the airport on the outer edges of the city, which has practically been besieged by the Taliban for months. "If reinforcements do not arrive the city will collapse into the hands of the Taliban," Karim Khademzai, head of the provincial capital, told AFP.

The Taliban are fighting to take over police and intelligence agency headquarters, residents said, voicing fears they will storm the local prison to free captured insurgents. Tarin Kot's normally bustling streets were deserted and shops closed as civilians sought to escape from the city. Sabir Menawal, a Tarin Kot resident, said Taliban fighters entered his house near the police headquarters and took up positions inside to fire at government buildings. "The Taliban instructed us to leave the area immediately," Menawal told AFP. "I fled with my family to a safer area of Tarin Kot, but we fear fighting could spread to this area too."

In a sobering admission, Uruzgan's police chief Wais Samim said many of the city's outer defenses had fallen to the Taliban without a fight. "Some policemen retreated from their outposts. Some people here deliberately want the enemy to succeed," he told AFP. "We will address this issue once we repel the enemy."

The fighting in Uruzgan comes as the Taliban are threatening to capture Lashkar Gah in neighbouring Helmand province, and northern Kunduz, which the insurgents briefly seized last year in a stinging blow to Afghan forces.

Deteriorating security

President Ashraf Ghani's office, meanwhile, said the government will not allow "Uruzgan to become a sanctuary for terrorists". "Reinforcements have reached the province, and the local police chief and provincial officials are on the frontline fighting the enemy," presidential spokesman Shahhussain Murtazawi said on Facebook.

That claim was refuted by multiple Tarin Kot residents, who said senior officials had been seen fleeing to the airport. "Many provincial officials including the governor and other heads of government departments are at the airport," Khademzai told AFP.

General Abdul Raziq, the powerful police chief of Kandahar, said he was personally leading a contingent of military reinforcements to Uruzgan. "We are going to Tarin Kot with hundreds of forces to repel the enemy attack," Raziq told AFP.

NATO has not yet responded to AFP's request for comment on whether foreign forces will intervene in Uruzgan. Since being toppled by a US invasion in 2001, the Taliban have been seen as a rural militant movement capable only of hit-and-run attacks on cities. But they have demonstrated an alarming new push into urban centers over the last year.

The deteriorating security highlights the struggle of Afghan forces, stretched on multiple fronts, to secure remote provinces such as Uruzgan, where Australian, Dutch and American troops fought for years. As the Taliban edged closer to Tarin Kot on Wednesday, they promised a general amnesty to government forces who surrender unconditionally. Defense ministry spokesman Mohammad Radmanish however rejected what the Taliban's "propaganda campaign", saying the Taliban would be beaten back. — AFP



ZABUL, AFGHANISTAN: In this Aug. 15, 2016 photo, Taliban suicide bombers stand guard during a gathering of a breakaway Taliban faction.—AP