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Journalist says rewritten article won MPI award

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - A re-written newspaper report on the condition of migrant workers in the Semenyih detention camp won the Malaysian Press Institute's News Feature Story Award 1996, the magistrate's court was told today.

The Sun reporter Selvi Gopal said she and colleagues Steven Gan and Umah Papachan re-wrote the story published on Aug 20, 1995 in the newspaper's Magazine section under the main title "Shattered Dreams".

She was testifying in the trial where Tenaganita Sdn Bhd director Irene Fernandez, 52, is charged under the Printing Presses and Publications Act for publishing a memorandum titled, "Abuse, torture and dehumanised treatment of migrant workers in detention camps."

The offence was allegedly committed at Tenaganita premises in Lorong Bunus Enam off Jalan Masjid India on Aug 25, 1995. She faces a maximum sentence of three years' jail or RM20,000 fine or both.

Selvi said the stories were re-written from a two-series article which were supposed to be published on June 11, 1995 under the main title "Death Camp" and on June 13, 1995 under the main title "Inside Story".

She said the award was presented by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Selvi said the original stories in "Death Camp" and "Inside Story" in which she wrote articles titled "Fortune Seekers" and "Honest Labour" respectively were spiked.

She said she was told of this by Gan and later by the company's managing director Philip Soo.

Selvi was about to answer counsel R. Sivarasa's question on the reason given by Soo for not publishing the stories when Deputy Public Prosecutor Shamsul Sulaiman objected.

Shamsul said the answer by Selvi would be hearsay unless Soo was called to testify.

Before proceedings started this morning, Shamsul told the court that the prosecution decided not to continue with its objection on Monday against the admissibility of the tape recordings made by Selvi.

"The prosecution thinks that it is more appropriate for the objection to be raised during the cross-examination of this witness later," he said.

The defence had produced four tapes. The first two contain interviews with migrant workers and a doctor from the Kajang Hospital, the third a telephone conversation with Dr Arasa Ratnam also from the Kajang Hospital and the fourth a face-to-face interview with Dr Arasa. All the recordings were made by Selvi.

The court was supposed to deliver its decision on the admissibility of the tapes yesterday but proceedings were postponed today as the accused was sick.

Today, the court also heard the face-to-face conversation between Selvi and Dr Arasa. The conversation revolved around the number of migrant workers from the Semenyih camp who died and of those admitted to hospital.

Asked by Sivarasa why Dr Arasa had earlier denied having the conversation with her, Selvi said Dr Arasa had refused to tell her more about the number of migrant workers from the Semenyih camp who were admitted and died at the hospital when she met her at the hospital.

She said Dr Arasa had on the previous day told her over the telephone that the hospital received dead bodies from the camp.

The information pertaining to the number of migrant workers who died or were admitted to the hospital was read in court today.

Selvi said during the phone conversation, Dr Arasa had told her that there were six migrant workers from the camp who died and were brought to the hospital.

Hearing before magistrate Julina Mohamad continues.

(END)