

Altantuya civil suit finally moves forward

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After eight years, the RM100 million civil suit filed by the family of slain Mongolian Altantuya Shaariibuu against political analyst Abdul Razak Baginda and the Malaysian government, got some traction with the Shah Alam High Court today fixing further case management for March 13.

This would allow the family's lawyers - Ramkarpal Singh and Sangeet Kaur Deo - time to retrieve court records following the recent Federal Court decision to re-convict and mete the death sentence on Chief Inspector Azilah Hadri and Corporal Sirul Azhar Umar for Altantuya's murder.

Ramkarpal said he and co-counsel had met the Shah Alam High Court registrar this morning to discuss the matter.

He said court records for the appeal to the Federal Court were necessary for the suit as Azilah and Sirul were also named as defendants besides Abdul Razak and the government.

"Hence, we will use the time granted to gather the appeal records," said Ramkarpal.

Mental shock

The civil suit was filed by Altantuya's father Shaariibuu Setev (right), his wife Altansetseg Sanjaaand and their grandchildren Mungunshagai Bayarjargal, 16, and Altanshagai Munkhthulga, 11, in 2007.

The family in their statement of claim are seeking compensatory, exemplary and aggravated damages for mental shock and psychological trauma caused to them following the 'brutal and barbaric manner' in which Altantuya was shot dead and her body blown up with C4 explosives.

They alleged that this was done at the behest of the high authority in the Ministry of Defence and police to which Azilah and Sirul were attached to.

Sirul had been found guilty of Altantuya's murder along with chief inspector Azilah after the Federal Court on Jan 13 reversed a Court of Appeal decision acquitting them of the murder charge.

Altantuya was said to have acted as an interpreter in the Malaysian government's multi-billion ringgit Scorpene submarines deal with France and Spain.

Sirul and Azilah were then part of the elite police commando unit assigned to escort Malaysian VVIPs including Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

Sirul fled the country before the Federal Court sitting. He is currently under detention in Australia.

What's the motive?

Controversy around the case has continued to swirl as none of the courts hearing the murder case - the Shah Alam High Court, the Court of Appeal and Federal Court - broached the motive of Altantuya's murder, which also saw Razak, seen as close to Najib, being charged with abetment to murder.

However, he was acquitted without his defence being called in 2009. The prosecution did not appeal the acquittal.

Ramkarpal (right) had reiterated his late father Karpal Singh's statement that in the civil suit they would call prime minister Najib Abdul Razak and his former aide de camp DSP Musa Safri.

Musa who had handpicked Azilah and Sirul to deal with Altantuya, was not called by the prosecution during the trial.

This resulted in the Court of Appeal acquitting the two, ruling that his absence was detrimental to prosecution's case.

This had led to the late Karpal reiterating that Musa would be called along with Najib who was the Defence Minister, responsible for the purchase of the two Scorpene submarines.

The purchase of the submarines is being investigated by the French authorities.