

Court protest over murder trial

By NOOR TOORANI
Pictures: ROY MATHEWS

DOZENS of protesters gathered outside the Justice and Islamic Affairs Ministry yesterday to demonstrate against the continuing trial of 19 men accused of murdering a policeman.

The streets surrounding the complex echoed to the chants of relatives, who stood in the sun for two hours, holding placards demanding they be released, after being denied entry.

Riot police blocked off the entrance to the courts amid tight security and requested to see the identification card of every civilian who tried to enter the courtroom.

The Bahrainis are on trial at the High Criminal Court for the premeditated murder of Pakistani Majid Asghar Ali Baksh. They have denied the charges.

The 24-year-old was allegedly murdered in an ambush on his patrol jeep in Karzakan in April last year.

They are also accused of attempting to murder the two men who were with him and of rioting.

However, they will have to wait another four months to learn their fate as the case was adjourned until October 13 for a verdict.

Prosecutors demanded "toughest punishment" – either the death sentence or life behind bars.

But the 18-member defence team claimed witness testimonies proved that Mr Baksh threw himself from the moving vehicle onto the pavement and sustained fatal injuries.

They also said the alleged secret investiga-



■ A female demonstrator with her child, and left, relatives protest outside the complex

tions showed that police knew that an attack was due to take place on the night of his death.

The defence submitted final papers, including a general overview of the trial and separate defence for each accused.

Prosecutors sought another adjournment to question the defendants on their confessions, which the court rejected.

The defence papers dismissed testimonies of the two survivors, saying neither had positively identified the defendants.

Lawyers also claimed the arrest warrants were null and void because they did not include each defendant's name and address.

They said previous evidence stating police had information that an attack was going to take place that night, was contradictory.

"They submitted two reports the following morning with the names of the defendants but

if that was true then why didn't they arrest them before the incident?"

The documents also rejected evidence submitted by the Public Prosecution regarding Mr Baksh's injuries.



■ Mr Baksh

"The medical examiner's report clearly stated that the cause of death was a fracture to the skull and such an injury is the result of a forceful impact between a human body and a large solid object," according to court documents.

"Such injuries are a result of high-speed accidents or falling from a height – not by hurling stones and bricks, which couldn't possibly reach the jeep from where the men were allegedly standing."

The defence also dismissed the Bahrainis' confessions, claiming they were forced out of them.

It is understood that two defendants denied the charges during interrogations.

The team also dismissed the charge of premeditated murder and said, "As the evidence stated, the jeep was attacked by a mob hurling Molotov cocktails, which doesn't indicate any form of premeditation."

Five of the men are also among 15 accused of burning a farm belonging to a senior member of the Ruling Family.

However, the case was suspended after lawyers claimed they were among 178 pardoned by His Majesty King Hamad in April.

It is understood they are still in custody because Mr Baksh's family have not agreed to their release.

Another eight Bahrainis, accused of murdering Pakistani Shaikh Mohammed Riaz, 56, are also in custody – despite reportedly being included in pardon.

Al Wefaq last night expressed shock at the continuation of the trial, saying the men pardoned by His Majesty should not be on trial.

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