

Pakistani soldier gets death for killing Shia youth

Five other soldiers and a civilian given life imprisonment for Sarfaraz Shah murder

staff & agencies

KARACHI — A Pakistani court on Friday found a paramilitary soldier guilty of murder and sentenced him to death for killing an unarmed man at point blank range in an incident caught on camera in a public park.

The Anti-Terrorism Court also handed life terms to five other paramilitary soldiers and a civilian who had accused Shah of robbery and dragged him over to them, AFP reported. It marked the first time that a civilian court in Pakistan has sentenced to death a serving member of the military. Although the Rangers paramilitary technically comes under the supervision of the interior ministry, it is considered part of the powerful armed forces, which has ruled the country for more than half its existence.

The June 8 killing of Sarfaraz Shah, a 22-year-old Shia Muslim, was filmed by a cameraman and broadcast on television, sparking a public backlash



Sarfaraz Shah (L) holds the barrel of a weapon of a paramilitary Ranger at a park in Karachi shortly before he was shot dead, June 8, 2011. (Getty Images)

over the brutality of trained officers.

Judge Bashir Ahmed Khoso read out the verdict before an anti-terrorism court in Karachi, finding Shahid

Zafar guilty of pulling the trigger, and sentenced him to death and a fine of 200,000 rupees (\$2,300).

“The crime of killing Sarfraz Shah has been proved against you and I announce the death sentence and also impose a fine of 200,000 rupees,” said Khoso, addressing Zafar.

He handed life terms to five other paramilitary soldiers and a civilian who had accused Shah of robbery and dragged him over to them.

The judge ordered each to pay 100,000 rupees to the victim’s family.

The verdict concludes a relatively swift trial which got underway after the seven defendants were formally charged with murder and terrorism on June 29, just weeks after the killing.

So extreme was the public and media reaction to the killing that the government also took the rare step of removing the provincial chiefs of police and Rangers in Karachi.

The widely-aired footage of the killing showed a clean-shaven and unarmed Shah, wearing black trousers and a navy shirt, pleading for his life before he is shot twice.

He then begs for help while the soldiers appear to do nothing but watch him lapse gradually into unconsciousness. Despite no evidence in the video that Shah was armed, Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik, whose ministry is responsible for the Rangers, had claimed that the victim had been carrying an unlicensed weapon.

Reactions

The family of Shah, including his brother Salik Shah was present during the hearing, where slogans of “justice has been done” were shouted.



Pakistani paramilitary soldier Shahid Zafar (2nd L), who shot unarmed youth Sarfaraz Shah at point blank range on June 8, is escorted to court in Karachi on August 12, 2011. (Getty Images)

Talking to the media, the victim’s brother thanked the Chief Justice of Pakistan for taking suo motu notice of the incident. He also urged the High Court to uphold the Anti-Terrorism court’s verdict if and when the convicts approach it.

He also said the police tried hard to save the culprits, adding that he

however trusts the court.

The victim’s parents also seemed content with the verdict. His mother said the person who dragged Sarfraz to the Rangers should also be given death sentence.

She also requested the High Court to uphold the anti-terrorism court’s verdict.

Abbas confirms will for reconciliation

GAZA — Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas phoned Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haneyya on Thursday congratulating him on the holy month of Ramadan and assuring the need to preserve the reconciliation atmosphere in general and meetings in Cairo and Gaza in particular.

Abbas emphasized during the conversation the need to implement the issues agreed upon in Cairo, like the political prisoners issue, passports and social reconciliation.

He pointed out the positive atmosphere that enveloped the latest meeting in Cairo as well the meeting

with Ruhi Fattouh in Gaza, stressing that he would take care not to turn back, saying: “We want to work together on this issue”.

In return, PM Haneyya congratulated Abbas and all of the Palestinians and emphasized the need to safeguard a positive climate.

“There is no turning back. We need to accelerate practical steps to translate the reconciliation on the ground through the said issues,” he said, also stressing the importance of continued contact in order to see that the matter through.

(Source:

Palestine Information Center)

Israel limits access to al-Aqsa Mosque

Israeli police forces have been deployed en masse to once again limit Palestinian access to the al-



Aqsa Mosque compound in East al-Quds (Jerusalem) during the holy month of Ramadan.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been banned from attending the second Friday prayer event in Ramadan, Press TV reported.

Access has been denied to all men under the age of 50 and all women under the age of 45.

Palestinians have called the restrictions a “collective punishment,” and said that the movement-restrictions imposed on them have affected their economy significantly and made traveling extremely difficult.

This is not the first time that Israel limits access to the al-Aqsa Mosque compound for Friday prayers. During the first Friday of Ramadan (August 5), they only allowed men aged between 45 and 50 to enter the compound.

(Source: Press TV)

NATO: 8 troops die in two days in Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Eight NATO service members have been killed in the past two days of fight-



ing in Afghanistan, where the U.S.-led coalition is still mourning the deaths of 30 American troops and eight Afghans killed in the shoot down of their Chinook helicopter in the east, military officials said Friday.

The latest service member to be killed died Friday in a roadside bombing in southern Afghanistan, the coalition said.

On Thursday, five U.S. troops died in a separate roadside bomb blast in the south, U.S. military officials said. No other details were released about the deaths.

Also on Thursday, a French soldier was killed when a roadside bomb exploded on a convoy 4 miles (7 kilometers) south of Tagab in Kapisa province in the east, the French defense ministry said in a statement. Four other French soldiers were wounded in the attack.

‘Mass rallies to continue in Bahrain’

A senior Bahraini cleric says that a number of mass rallies are going to be held across Bahrain in the next few days. Besides, people plan to converge on central Manama’s now destroyed Pearl Square, and the country’s main opposition party, Al-Wefaq, is organizing a large-scale demonstration.

Sheikh Abdullah al-Dabbaq told IRNA on Thursday that Bahrainis’ steadfastness to redress their rights, firmness and resistance under torturers, as well as international pressure have forced the ruling Al Khalifa family to bend to the public demands.

He noted that Bahrain’s nation exemplified that no government can stand

against the will and desire of its own people. Dabbaq added that around 147 detainees, who were arrested earlier in anti-government protests, were released recently by Bahrain’s authorities. He said some former lawmakers were among the protesters freed. The senior Bahraini cleric pointed out that the ongoing revolution in Bahamian will soon show results amid anti-regime protests in towns and villages around the Persian Gulf kingdom. Dabbaq said that international pressure is mounting on Al Khalifa regime; and Bahrain’s rulers are worried to be brought to justice before the International Criminal Court in The Hague, the Netherlands. (Source: Shiitenews)

Israel’s new settlement plans irk U.S. and EU

Israel’s approval of construction plans for 1,600 homes in East Jerusalem has reignited a dispute



with Washington over the threat of new settlements to the upcoming Palestinian statehood debate.

The White House on Thursday urged Israel and the Palestinians to avoid any actions that jeopardize efforts to restart stalled peace talks.

The press briefing did not specifically mention the new approval, but the announcement of the same project last year during a visit by Vice President Biden caused a diplomatic rift. Jay Carney, White House spokesperson, ducked a question on Thursday about whether Israel’s approval for the construction of the new settler homes would make it harder to convince the Palestinians not to seek statehood at the United Nations.

“Our position on that has not changed, which is that we urge both sides not to take any action that makes it harder for the two sides to come together and negotiate,” he told reporters. (Source: Al Jazeera)

Riot erupts in southwest China town: reports

BEIJING (Reuters) — Thousands of Chinese took to the streets of a southwestern town on Thurs-



day, with some smashing police vehicles in the latest protest by citizens angered by the rough handling of local officials, according to news reports.

The protest in Qianxi County, Guizhou province, was the latest of thousands of brief, local riots and demonstrations that happen in China every year, and like many recent outbreaks this one pitted residents against “urban administration” officials charged with enforcing law and order.

A “clash broke out between urban administration officials and the owner of an illegally parked vehicle, drawing in thousands of onlookers and sparking incidents of crowds smashing law enforcement vehicles and blocking roads,” the website of China National Radio (http://cns.cnr.cn) reported on Friday.

COMMENT

Nightmare on London streets

Simon Lee

The winds of change have begun to blow in Britain as violence is creeping like a nightmare across the whole area. In fact, it is the worst violence in a generation in Britain.

Having deployed 16,000 police officers in London, the British government has exhibited signs of fear which is crippling a government which is at its wit’s end as to how to handle the crisis. British Prime Minister David Cameron has threatened the use of water cannons to smother the flow which has swept Britain for four consecutive days.

Unrest has been reported in cities including Manchester, Salford, Liverpool, Nottingham and Birmingham, with stores and banks being looted, vandalized and set ablaze. Three men – two brothers and a friend died when they were hit by a car in Birmingham while they were protecting their property from being looted.

In a statement released outside No 10, the British Prime Minister David Cameron has announced that police would be allowed to employ whatever resources they need to quell the riot. He revealed that: 1. Police are allowed to use rubber bullets any time they deem necessary; 2. Water cannons will be available at 24 hours notice; 3. Courts shall be conducting judiciary duties overnight to deal with riots cases. So far, hundreds of people have been arrested and interrogated; 4. Photographs of rioters will be published and their identities will be divulged. “Picture by picture, these criminals are being identified and arrested, and we will not let any phony concerns about human rights get in the way of the publication of these pictures and the arrest of these individuals.”; 5. Anyone involved in the riots will be sent directly to prison.

These desperate efforts by the British government represent a government in crisis, a government barely believing what’s happening in the country, and a government unprepared for such acts meant to play havoc with the social order and thus bring about radical changes in the system.

Expressing his desperation and ire at the horrible events, Cameron has stated, “When we see children as young as 12 and 13 looting and laughing, when we see the disgusting sight of a young man with people pretending to help him while they are robbing him, it is clear that there are things badly wrong with our society.”

Speaking at a press conference on Wednesday morning, he said in a threatening tone that the police was “absolutely intent” on bringing the rioters to justice and that officers were already studying CCTV.

“Hundreds and hundreds of people, we have your image, we have your face, we have your acts of wanton criminality on film. We are coming for you, from today and no matter how long it takes, we will arrest those people responsible,” he said.

Fearing being accused of violating human rights, David Cameron vowed the government will not let ‘phony human rights’ concerns impede tracking down suspects from riots in London and other parts of the country. Calling the protesters criminals, he “said, Picture by picture these criminals are being identified and arrested and we will not let any phony concerns about human rights get in the way of the publication of these pictures and the arrest of these individuals.”

The present events are not at all irrelevant to the students protest some while ago. What happened in London as student protest was not limited to the rise in tuition fees and among the protesters were people from all walks of life. Important among what they protested against were the rise in tuition fees, a cut in pensions and other social benefits and the growing rate in unemployment. In other words, the protesters demanded reforms in the social and administrative structures of the whole country while the British government turned a deaf ear to their demands and instead of judiciously tackling the problem and dealing with their demands, they resorted to brute force and crushed their protests.

Today, these protests manifest themselves in a different garment, the garment of rebellion. Vandalism is a social phenomenon; it is a type of rebellion and cannot be simply regarded as an act of hooliganism. It is a cry of protest against social norms. Yet, the British government prefers not to see that their rotten system is doomed to fail and that it has revealed it manifold threadbare superficiality. Their interpretation of the situation is so simple: the people on the streets are bunches of pyromaniac adventurers who seek no goals other than setting ablaze shops and public utilities and quenching their thirst for adventurism.

Undoubtedly, what is happening in Britain is not an Arab spring but it is certainly a heavy blow to the body of a ramshackle pseudo-democratic government in the West.

The winds of change have reached Great Britain though in a violent form and are proving that Great Britain is no longer “Great” and that it should put a stop to its wrong policies; British chickens come home to roost.

(Source: Press TV)

