

Parents in tug-of-war over burial

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN
Staff Writer

Little Farah Khan's mother touched down in Toronto yesterday in a bid to prevent her daughter's body being sent to Pakistan for burial.

An exhausted Shahida Jabeen and her brother Shaukat Ali traveled 24 hours by plane, yesterday after a five-hour road trip to get to an international airport from their small village in Ghakar, Pakistan.

They were met by Markham Councillor Khalid Usman who, with the help of a few friends, paid for the two airline tickets.

"She's absolutely exhausted and she hasn't said a word yet," Usman said yesterday.

Usman said he hopes to keep media at bay, at least for a day or two, to give Jabeen a chance to rest.

He's sure she has no idea how intense media scrutiny on this case has been.

"She's tired and she shouldn't have to face all the cameras right away," he said.

Usman also will not say where Jabeen will stay while in Toronto.

The Ward 7 councillor, as a member of the International Muslims Organization, has been working to get permission to bury Farah here. That's in keeping with Muslim tradition which requires a body to be buried as soon as possible after death and where the death occurred.

Farah was decapitated and dismembered; her partial remains discovered in several green garbage bags by a passer-by Dec. 7 in an Etobicoke park.



FARAH KHAN

After a tip from the Coroner's office that the victim was of South Asian descent, Farah's teacher came forward to say she had been told by the stepmother earlier that month the family was moving back to Pakistan.

Shortly afterwards, Farah's stepmother, Kaneez Fatma, 45, and her father, Muhammad Ahsan Khan, 36, were arrested and charged with first-degree murder.

As Farah's guardian, Khan retains the right to decide where she'll be laid to rest.

The IMO drafted a letter, delivered to Khan in his jail cell Wednesday, begging him to do the right thing. So far, he has refused, Usman said.

"He is insisting the body be sent back," a frustrated Usman said. "The irony is we talk about the rights of the accused, but what about the rights of the abused? It's very sad."

Usman and other IMO members will spend the weekend briefing Jabeen on the situation and outlining options, which include going to court for the right to bury Farah here.

"We will leave it to her," he said. "We'll discuss everything with her and look at all her options and let her decide. Personally, I don't think he has a moral right to send that body back."

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