Court date is set for fire deaths accused

■ *Flashback ... firemen battle flames at the property where 13 men died*

A BAHRAINI arrested in Germany on Thursday is due to appear in court in September to face a manslaughter charge in connection with the deaths of 13 expatriates.

Abdulelah Mohammed Ali Hassan Al Mahoozi was not in Bahrain when he was acquitted by the High Criminal Court in March, but prosecutors appealed against the decision in the Supreme Criminal Appeals Court and the next hearing is scheduled for September 18.

He was among four people charged with manslaughter following the deaths of 13 Bangladeshis in a fire at their labour accommodation in Mukharqa on January 11 last year – one of the country's worst such tragedies in recent memory.

The government employee is accused of failing to report health and safety violations at the property before the blaze and forging official documents stating the premises were inspected and the owners warned.

He was never arrested and was originally acquitted due to lack of evidence, but judges were scathing about the state of the building and described it as a "hell" from which the 13 victims could not escape.

They sentenced three other men – the brothers who owned the property – to five years in jail for manslaughter after hearing 130 building occupants were crammed into a 40-metre space with no basic precautions.

Bangladesh Embassy labour counsellor Mohammed Islam told the *GDN* he had been impressed by Bahrain's efforts to prosecute those responsible.

"I think Bahraini authorities have done a remarkable job in following up this case since January last year and have taken action against the individuals involved," he said.

By SANDEEP SINGH GREWAL

The diplomat said families of the 13 men received BD2,150 each in compensation from the Bangladeshi government and community members in Bahrain.

However, an online petition has been launched against Mr Al Mahoozi's arrest on his arrival at Frankfurt Airport, in Germany, last week.

He was wanted by Interpol based on a request made by the Bahraini authorities on March 14 last year – just two months after the tragic blaze.

Motivation

Opposition activists have called on German authorities not to extradite him to Bahrain, claiming his arrest has been motivated by his political views.

However, Migrant Workers Protection Society chairwoman Marietta Dias said politics should not cloud investigations into the deaths of 13 innocent labourers.

"This (his political view) does not absolve him," she said.

Meanwhile, German Ambassador Sabine Taufmann said she could not comment.

"The German Embassy does not comment on extradition proceedings or on details of the arrest warrant," she said.

"Decisions on the admissibility of an extradition are taken in Germany by an independent higher regional court."

The massive fire that killed 13 men living in a three-storey building broke out as two tenants were cooking.

Gas cylinders in the kitchen caught fire, which resulted in fire rapidly spreading through illegal wooden partitions.

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