

Philippine massacre trial hearings

WAIT TILL YEAR END!

Manila
Trial hearings of defendants' accused of the massacre of 58 people in the Philippines will finish by the end of the year, the country's chief justice vowed yesterday.

Prosecution and defence lawyers will finish presenting evidence by the end of 2015, after which the judge has 90 days to issue a verdict, Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno told reporters.

"It is excruciatingly slow for the victims' families. That is not debatable, it is painful, there must be closure," Sereno said.

The trial involves members of the influential Ampatuan clan, which allegedly ordered the slaughter of 58 people, including 32 journalists, in the conflict-racked province of Maguindanao in November 2009 in an attempt to crush a rival clan's election challenge.

The brutal massacre, one of

the world's deadliest attacks against media workers, saw some shot in their genitals before they were buried in a hilltop grave using an

excavator. The slow pace of the trial has angered the families of the victims and frustrated President Benigno Aquino, who has promised a

verdict before he steps down from office in mid-2016. Widows of victims spoke out last month after one of the principal accused, Andal Ampatuan Snr, died of liver cancer while under hospital guard.

Sereno said the court has resolved most of the bail petitions that caused much of the delays in the six-year long proceedings.

Two sons of Andal Ampatuan Snr, Andal Jnr and Zaldy, are among 100 people on trial for one of the world's most shocking mass murders.

The Ampatuans ruled Maguindanao for over a decade under the patronage of then-president Gloria Arroyo, who had tolerated the clan's private army as a buffer against Muslim separatist rebels.

Widow Merly Perante, whose journalist husband Ronnie was among those slain, said she was cheered by



Former Governor of the Philippine province of Maguindanao Andal Ampatuan Senior (C) and four members of the Ampatuan clan are escorted by policemen as they arrive at the Villamor Airbase in Manila (File Photo)

Arrest warrant issued for Pak ex-PM

Karachi

A Pakistani anti-corruption court yesterday issued arrest warrants for former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani as well as one of his senior ministers in a dozen graft cases against them.

The court ordered the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), which probed the cases, to apprehend Gilani, who was prime minister from 2008 to 2012, along with ex-commerce minister Makhdoom Amin Fahim and produce them before a judge on September 10.

"Yes, the court has issued the arrest warrants against them and to produce them into the court on the next hearing," an FIA official said.

Gilani can appeal to a higher court to allow him to post bail to avoid arrest before the hearing, but Fahim is unlikely to appear because he is receiving cancer treatment in Britain.

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Sereno's announcement, but stressed that getting justice was still her priority.

"I accept that the process can be lengthy, as long as we are not disappointed with the result, as long as they get convicted and get the right punishment," she said.

IS kills two generals in Iraq, advances in Syria

Baghdad

A suicide attack claimed by the Islamic State group killed two Iraqi generals yesterday in the key battleground province of Anbar, as the jihadists made gains in neighbouring Syria.

IS overran large areas of Iraq in 2014 and seized Anbar capital Ramadi earlier this year. Military spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Rasool said a suicide bomber in an explosives-rigged vehicle struck the Al Jaraishi area north of Ramadi as Iraqi forces advanced. IS claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement online.

UK migration hits record level over 12 months

London

Net migration to Britain has hit record levels, official figures showed yesterday, with the difference between migrants leaving and arriving in Britain rising to around 329,000 in the year to March.

"The net migration figure was a statistically significant increase from 236,000 in year ending March 2014 and is the highest net migration on record," the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

Immigration Minister James Brokenshire called the figures "deeply disappointing".

Prime Minister David

Cameron had vowed to reduce the numbers to less than 100,000 by May of this year. Some 636,000 people immigrated to Britain over the 12-month period, a rise of 84,000, while 307,000 people emigrated, down 9,000.

The net figure is 9,000 more than the previous record, which was set in the year ending June 2005.

The report found that 269,000 EU citizens had moved to Britain permanently, a "statistically significant" increase of 56,000.

Around 53,000 were Romanian and Bulgarian citizens, almost double the 28,000 in the previous 12



A migrant climbs over a fence near Calais

months. Prime Minister Cameron has vowed to hold a referendum on Britain's

membership of the European Union by 2017, and is hoping to wrest powers from Brussels,

particularly over immigration, before the vote.

Brokenshire called the figures a "wake-up call".

"While these figures underline the challenges we need to meet to reduce net migration, they should also act as a further wake-up call for the EU. Current flows of people across Europe are on a scale we haven't seen since the end of the Second World War," he said.

"This is not sustainable and risks the future economic development of other EU member states. It reinforces the need for further reform at an EU level as well as within the UK."

Teary Exit

Washington

One of the two giant panda twins born at Washington's Smithsonian National Zoo over the weekend died on Wednesday, turning unexpected joy to tragedy in a matter of days.

After an ultrasound revealed a possible pregnancy a week ago, zookeepers were greeted with another surprise on Saturday when 17-year-old panda Mei Xiang gave birth to not one, but two baby cubs.

But the keepers struggled to keep the smaller of the two healthy as Mei Xiang focused

her attention on the larger cub. The undersize cub - nearly half the weight of the other - passed away on Wednesday, four days after its unexpected birth had made it an Internet sensation.

"This is a very hard loss for us," zoo director Dennis Kelly told a press conference.

"It's really hard to keep those little creatures thriving."

Zookeepers faced an uphill battle after they had trouble convincing Mei Xiang to swap between caring for the smaller and larger cub.

Tiny, blind, nearly hairless

and with little ability to regulate their own body temperature, newborn pandas are completely dependent on their mothers.

Keepers had stepped into that maternal role by bottle-feeding the cub and administering antibiotics to stave off infections, but their efforts ultimately fell short.

"After the last swap this morning, we immediately noticed that it appeared weaker, with possible respiratory problems," chief veterinarian Don Neiffer said.

"We did see some

improvements... but things turned and its condition declined. We weren't able to turn things."

Prior to its death, the cub had stopped gaining weight and was only 79.8 grams (2.8 ounces) when it died, as opposed to the 137.7 grams of its larger sibling.

Neiffer noted that newborn cubs are extremely fragile and that the cause of death would not be known for sure until an autopsy is performed in the next few weeks.

But he also said the larger cub was doing very well.



A smaller of two panda cubs born to Giant Panda Mei Xiang is fed from a bottle (File Photo)

"We have a very healthy panda. We remain very optimistic about the animal,"

Neiffer said. It is too early to determine the sex of either cub.