

Trial of 2 in LSU grad student killings delayed

BY JOE GYAN JR.

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Two Baton Rouge men accused in the 2007 slaying of two LSU graduate students from India won't stand trial Monday because evidence gathered during the murder probe is still being turned over to the defense, attorneys on both sides said Friday.

Casey Jermaine Gathers, 24, and Michael Jermaine Lewis, 23, each are charged with two counts of second-degree murder in the Dec. 13, 2007, killing of Kiran Kumar Allam, 33, and Chandrasekhar Reddy Komma, 31, at Allam's Edward Gay apartment on the edge of LSU's campus.

On the eve of the trial, the East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney's Office filed a motion asking state District Judge Chip Moore to continue the trial. A new date could be selected Monday.

"The State of Louisiana is still in the process of discovery and disclosure of documents related to the task force investigation conducted in this case. Scientific evidence is still being worked up," Assistant District Attorney Steve Danielson wrote in the motion.

Danielson added the state believes "it is in the interests of justice that the discovery process of this case be completed prior to the case proceeding to trial."

Former prosecutor Beau Brock, who represents Gathers, agreed Friday but said his client should be released from jail in the meantime. Gathers, described by authorities as the alleged triggerman, and Lewis are being held on \$250,000 bonds.

"This new information which has been turned over five years after the crime has opened doors we must walk through to see who really killed these two people," Brock said. "They've (prosecutors) put us in a spot where it's impossible for us to go forward" at this time.

District Attorney Hillar Moore III reiterated that he believes the persons responsible for the deaths of Allam and Komma are in custody.

"We're confident in our case," he said.

Moore explained that much of the information recently turned over to the defense has been housed at LSU on a disk, but the retrieval of the material from the disk proved to be a challenge. The information, he said, includes other people that LSU police spoke with, interviewed "or had tips on."

Brock said he has issued subpoenas under court seal based on the newly released information.

"The District Attorney's Office has provided us with detailed information on 15 other people, two of whom were identified in photographic lineups as being identical to persons (seen) leaving (the area) at the time of the crime," he said.

Another person named in the documents had a "personal reason" to kill the two students, Brock said.

Devin Jamell Parker, 23, also of Baton Rouge, pleaded guilty last year to armed robbery and accessory charges in the case and agreed to testify in any future legal proceedings. He has not been sentenced.

Brock and Jason Chatagnier, who represents Lewis, contend there are many inconsistencies in Parker's police statements for him to be trusted.

Danielson has said Parker implicated Gathers and Lewis in the killings and told detectives details of the crimes that only someone present at the scene would have known.

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