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Justice Delivered: Seminary Head, Son, and Guard Sentenced to Life in Child Rape and Murder Case

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In a rare but welcome display of justice, a court in Samarbagh has handed down life sentences to three men, including a seminary leader and his son, for the horrific rape and murder of a seven-year-old girl in Lower Dir, Pakistan. The brutal case had outraged the community and highlighted long-standing concerns about unchecked abuse in religious institutions.

On Monday, the Additional Sessions Judge in Samarbagh convicted **Maulana Ziaul Haq Haidari**, his son **Abu Bakar**, and their bodyguard **Sanaullah** for their roles in the assault and

killing of the young girl, who had been living at their **orphanage-cum-seminary** in the Mandizo area of Jandol, a region in the Lower Dir district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The court sentenced all three to life imprisonment and added terms of 25, 3, and 2 years, respectively, along with a collective fine of **Rs500,000** (approximately USD 1,800). The verdict arrives over a year after the child's death, which initially appeared shrouded in secrecy and deceit.

According to the **First Information Report (FIR)** filed on **May 23, 2024**, at Munda police station, the girl had been assaulted and murdered, and attempts were made to cover up the crime. The case was filed under several sections of the **Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) 302** (murder), **376** (rape), and **201** (destruction of evidence) as well as **Section 53** of the **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act**, which deals with offenses against minors.

Her father, Sartaj, stated in the FIR that he was informed by the seminary administration on May 17 that his daughter had died and was asked to collect her body. He later alleged that she had been killed days earlier and that her death was deliberately hidden to obstruct justice.

The **District Public Prosecutor (DPP)**, Rafiullah, led the prosecution team with significant determination, supported by **Assistant Public Prosecutor (APP)** Ubaidullah, who presented evidence and arguments that convinced the court of the defendants' guilt.

While the justice system in Pakistan often faces criticism for delays and political interference, this case has, at least for now, concluded with accountability, a rarity when perpetrators hold religious or institutional authority.

Still, the broader issue remains: how such institutions, especially those operating as orphanages or seminaries, continue to lack proper oversight. Despite repeated cases of abuse tied to religious schools, the state's response has too often been tepid.

This tragic case is not an isolated one but part of a pattern enabled by weak enforcement and a reluctance by authorities to challenge religious institutions, even when criminal behavior is evident. The sentencing may offer a sense of closure for the grieving family, but it also raises urgent questions about child protection in Pakistan and the role of institutions that, despite claiming moral authority, have repeatedly failed the most vulnerable.