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## Murder of journalist was 'professional'

By Staff Reporter

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THE murder of journalist Martin O'Hagan was a "professional assassination" carried out because of his investigations into loyalist paramilitaries, the High Court has heard.

Prosecution lawyers also revealed a key witness claims he saw the smoldering remains of burnt clothes allegedly worn by the gang involved in the shooting.

That man, identified only as Witness A, said he helped recover parts of the suspected getaway car which crashed after Mr O'Hagan was shot near his home in Lurgan, Co Armagh in September 2001.

Details emerged as one of the men charged with murdering the Sunday World reporter, 43-year-old Nigel Leckey, along with Drew King (40) from Moss Road, Waringstown, was granted bail.

David Russell, prosecuting, said it was alleged that Leckey from Bowens Lane, Lurgan, stored the Subaru car used in the attack on Mr O'Hagan as he walked home with his wife from their local pub.

"The operation bears all the hallmarks of a professional assassination," he said.

"The motive behind it appears to be the investigative work which was carried out by Mr O'Hagan and in particular the criticisms he had aired in the newspaper in respect of local loyalist paramilitaries."

The court heard how a series of arrests carried out last month were based on information Witness A gave to police more than a year ago.

Opposing bail, Mr Russell confirmed Witness A was not on a protection scheme.

He added that the family of another co-accused had left the north amid fear of retribution at what was revealed during his police interviews.

But rejecting arguments that Leckey may flee if released, Conn O'Neill, defending, said his client had a 20-year business to run .

"He's a man who lives for his family and his business."

Mr Justice McLaughlin said that while all killings were dreadful, this had been a particularly notorious murder.

Releasing Leckey on sureties of £7,000, the judge ordered him to have no contact with any witnesses or co-accused.

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