

## **COURTSIDE: Bosanska Krajina Trial**

Witness describes Bosnian Serb persecution of minorities in Banja Luka region.

In the trial of Radoslav Brdjanin and General Momir Talic, accused of genocide in Bosnian Krajina, the court last week heard how the ethnic cleansing of the city of Banja Luka began with the abolition of the utilities company, Cistoca (Cleanliness).

Witness Muharem Krzic spoke of how Cistoca became redundant in the spring of 1992 when the Serb-run local authority decided minority Muslim and Croats could be forced to do the work for free.

"You could see the managers of the biggest trading companies, university

professors, doctors... sweeping streets and collecting garbage in the

streets, cleaning the ditches and the sewage, or chopping wood," said

Krzic, then local president of the mainly Muslim Party of Democratic Action, SDA.

Krzic described how tension worsened in the Banja Luka region after war

broke out in Croatia, as armed and uniformed paramilitaries took to the

streets, abusing Bosniaks and Croats and singing Second World War Chetnik songs, with lines like, "There won't be any Muslims from here to Tehran".

Songs about Bosnia were banned from the local radio and newspapers wrote that Muslims and Croats were a danger to Serbs. After the conflict erupted, Krzic said the situation in Banja Luka deteriorated. Bosniaks and Croats were subjected to ever more frequent direct attacks. Bombs were planted in their flats, houses and business enterprises, while armed paramilitaries terrorised civilians in other ways.

Banja Luka's Bosniaks approached General Momir Talic, who in April 1992 commanded the 5th Corps of the Yugoslav People's Army, JNA, later renamed the First Krajina Corps, to halt the violence.

At the end of May 1992, Krzic headed a non-party delegation that requested General Talic's help. Even in May 1992, Krzic said, many Bosniaks believed the JNA was a neutral force that would protect them from Serb extremists.

General Talic promised to organise a couple of brigades to patrol towns and the villages in the region, especially at night when attacks were most frequent. Krzic said Talic treated the delegation, and especially the Mufti of Banja Luka, "with respect".

Despite the Bosnian Serb commander's promises, the situation worsened daily, while in neighbouring Prijedor things became desperate. There, entire villages and towns had been destroyed, men detained in camps and women and children deported. At the beginning of June 1992, Krzic said he was told a train had reached Banja Luka station containing expelled Bosniaks.

Together with several local Muslim representatives, he went to the station where he saw 15 to 30 train carriages, some of which were cattle trucks, full of people begging for water. Serb soldiers stood along the platform. An attempt by a station employee to bring water in a bucket to the desperately thirsty people ended with a soldier overturning the bucket, spilling the water and chasing Krzic and his associates from the station, swearing and making threats.

The witness said he never found out where those people had come from, though the attacks on Kozarac and other Muslim towns round Prijedor had started by then. He never learnt of the destiny of the people he saw that day.

A Muslim delegation again asked to be received by Talic at the end of June 1992. Krzic said they presented facts about the deterioration of the situation in the city, as well as information on the establishment of camps and "detention centres" in Bosnian Krajina.

Talic told them to approach the municipal crisis staff concerning the camps, as only the military prison at Manjaca fell under direct army control. Krzic said Talic told them "to keep quiet" since "the situation

would improve".

The Banja Luka Bosniaks awaited the "improvement" in vain. They did not adopt Talic's suggestion to approach the crisis headquarters, as its chief, Radoslav Brdjanin, was well known for his hostility towards minorities, calling them "a death threat". At one public appearance, Krzic said, Brdjanin described non-Serbs as "vermin, scum, cockroaches that ought to be squashed".

The witness further claimed that Brdjanin condemned Serbs who sought to help Croat or Bosniaks.

Krzic's testimony will continue next week with a cross-examination by Brdjanin and Talic's defence.

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