



ERIK NASARENKO

VENTURA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

NEWS RELEASE



Follow us @VenturaCountyDA
DA.VenturaCounty.gov

Contact: Joey Buttitta
Title: Communications Manager/PIO
Phone: (805) 767-3400
Email: Joey.Buttitta@venturacounty.gov

Approved: SW
Date: January 12, 2026
Release No.: 26-007

Zarbab Ali Sentenced to Life in Prison Without Parole for First-Degree Murder of Estranged Wife in Simi Valley

VENTURA, Calif. – Ventura County District Attorney Erik Nasarenko announced today that Zarbab Ali (DOB 01/04/97), of Hawthorne, was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for the first-degree murder of Rachael Castillo, the mother of their children. Ms. Castillo was in the process of divorcing the defendant, and the divorce was nearly complete at the time Ali murdered her. Ali was convicted on November 21, 2025, of first-degree murder with the special circumstance that the murder was committed by means of lying in wait. Prior to trial, Ali pled guilty to the felony crime of sexual contact with the victim's remains after her death.

At sentencing, the court heard powerful victim impact statements from Ms. Castillo's family and loved ones, who emphasized that "Rachel was more than a victim." She was remembered as "a devoted mother, loving sister, a daughter, and a friend," with "a silly, soft-spoken voice that would make anyone smile." Family members told the court that Rachel had recently begun her master's program at Pepperdine University and "had dreams for her and her boys' future," adding, "She deserved to watch them grow."

Addressing the defendant directly, speakers described his actions in stark terms, stating, "You are here because you are a coward." They told the court that when confronted with responsibility, "you turned to violence," and spoke on behalf of "two innocent children whose lives were forever changed." While acknowledging that Rachel cannot be brought back, family members urged accountability and protection for her children.

Senior Deputy District Attorney David Russell, a member of the Ventura County District Attorney's Office Major Crimes Homicides Unit, prosecuted the case.

"Where any human being should feel shame, disgust, and loathing for what he has done, the defendant has shown no remorse," Mr. Russell said. "His actions place him among the very worst

offenders this court will ever see. He deserved no leniency, and today's sentence ensures he will never again be free to endanger another person or inflict further harm on society."

On November 10, 2022, Ali arrived at the Simi Valley apartment where Ms. Castillo lived with their two children and her sister. Earlier that day, Ali picked up the children and took them to his parents' home in Victorville. Knowing Ms. Castillo would be alone, he found the front door unlocked, went inside, turned off the lights, and waited for her to exit a bedroom. He then confronted her in a dark confined hallway and stabbed her 11 times in the neck and chest.

Ali wrapped her body in a blanket and attempted to clean the scene before placing her body in the trunk of his vehicle, which he had left open in advance. He drove to Littlerock, California, and buried Ms. Castillo in a shallow grave using a newly purchased shovel. He then returned to his parents' home where the children were.

When Ms. Castillo's sister returned home, she discovered signs of a violent attack and called 911. Although Ms. Castillo was missing, her personal belongings including her phone, keys, and car were still at the residence. Officers from the Simi Valley Police Department responded, located bloody items in a nearby dumpster, and spoke with witnesses who reported seeing Ali at the apartment complex.

After returning to Victorville and once his family was asleep, Ali drove back to the grave site after 2:00 a.m. He unearthed Ms. Castillo's body, engaged in sexual conduct with her remains, and buried her again.

On the morning of November 13, 2022, detectives from the Simi Valley Police Department, assisted by the FBI, searched a remote area in the desert near Littlerock. The rural site was accessible by a dirt road and surrounded primarily by brush and sand. Investigators located vehicle tracks for approximately 70 yards, ending at disturbed soil. About 20 yards southeast of the dirt piles, investigators found a metal shovel. Beneath one of the disturbed areas of earth, law enforcement recovered Ms. Castillo's body.

After a thorough investigation by the Simi Valley Police Department with assistance from the FBI, officers arrested Ali for the murder of Rachel Castillo on Sunday, November 13, 2022, after he left his parents' home in Victorville.

Case: 2022029127

Defendant Information:

Zarbab Ali (DOB 01/04/97)

Hawthorne



Charges convicted of:

- PC 187(a) – Murder

Charges pled guilty to:

- HS 7052(a) – Unlawful mutilation, disinterment, or act of sexual contact with human remains

Special allegations found true:

- PC 12022(b)(1) – Use of deadly weapon (knife)
- PC 190.2(a)(15) – Murder by means of lying in wait

Zarbab Ali moments after the verdict is read in Courtroom 24 of the Ventura County Superior Court. (November 21, 2025)