

THE ADVOCATE

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Jury selection begins in Stamford cabbie murder trial

By John Nickerson

Jury selection began Tuesday in what could be the longest murder trial at the city's courthouse in several years.

Judge John Blawie told prospective jurors that the case against Stamford resident Shota Mekoshvili, who is accused of stabbing to death and robbing taxicab driver Mahomed Kamal, could last up to a month. Testimony in the case is scheduled to begin April 26.

Due to the expected length of the trial, it could take until the end of next week to choose the 12 jurors and four alternates.

Defense attorney Norm Pattis and senior Assistant State's Attorney James Bernardi, who is prosecuting the case, exhausted one panel of jurors with only one selected on Tuesday morning. Another panel of 18 was scheduled for the afternoon session.

Mekoshvili has been jailed since his arrest for the August 2014 murder of Kamal, 47, who police

“[Norm] Pattis and [Kevin] Smith will not present an alibi or mental disease or defect defense in the case.”

said was stabbed nearly two dozen times with a three-inch knife. Mekoshvili is being held at the Northern Correctional Institution since his arrest less than a day after the murder. He's been unable to post a \$1.1 million court appearance bond. On Tuesday, he sat quietly in a



Shota Mekoshvili, 29, is charged with first-degree murder in the stabbing death of taxi cab driver Mahomed Kamal, 47, on Wednesday Aug. 27, 2014, in Stamford, Conn.

sports jacket and collared shirt between Pattis and co-counsel Kevin Smith at the defense table.

Known throughout the state as a fierce defense attorney, Pattis recently represented Tony Moreno for killing his seven-month-old son by throwing

the baby off a bridge into the Connecticut River. A jury found Moreno guilty of murder in February.

Mekoshvili faces up to 60 years in prison if convicted of Kamal's murder on the Doolittle Road cul-de-sac early in the morning of Aug. 27, 2014.

Pattis and Smith will not present an alibi or mental disease or defect defense in the case. Pattis said he would present a self-defense case to the jury. He declined to comment further.

Bernardi also declined to comment on the case.

Police believe robbery was the motive for the murder since a witness said Kamal had as much as \$500 on him the morning he was killed, Mekoshvili's arrest affidavit said.

Kamal, who was married and had a 3-year-old son, is believed to have driven Mekoshvili to Doolittle Road about 3:30 a.m. Aug. 27, 2014. The two apparently knew each other and Kamal had previously given rides to Mekoshvili, the affidavit said.

A tipster alerted authorities that Mekoshvili said he stabbed someone to death because the man kept screaming while he was robbing him, police said. The tipster also saw bloody money inside Mekoshvili's



Fellow taxi cab drivers and friends hold signs outside State Superior Court demanding justice for Mohammed Kamal, the Stamford Taxi stabbed to death while on duty. Jury selection for Shota Mekoshvili, the alleged murderer in the case, is starting Tuesday.

apartment that morning, the affidavit said.

About 13 hours after Kamal's body was found, police said they needed to use a Taser to arrest Mekoshvili, who led officers on a foot chase in downtown Stamford.

Police said he had a gash on his nose and cuts on his forehead and right temple, believed to have been caused by a metal flashlight that Kamal wielded to protect himself during the robbery.

Over the past two weeks, Pattis has filed a motion to suppress much of the state's evidence against his client.

Pattis argues in the motion police arrested his client without probable cause and Mekoshvili's phone was illegally used to locate him, and therefore, statements and evidence collected should be inadmissible.

No date has been set for a hearing on the motion. ■