

Isolated Cells Ready for Sirhan at Vacaville Medical Facility

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If and when Sirhan Bishara Sirhan reaches the California Medical Facility for prisoners at Vacaville, the admitted slayer of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy will be isolated in a tight little world all his own.

He will sleep, eat, bathe and receive visitors in three cells secured by heavy screens from other sections of the facility's maximum security cellblock.

He will be under the direct supervision of a guard 24 hours a day and his meals will be prepared individually, probably by a guard.

Prison officials are afraid the little 25-year-old Palestinian Arab might be killed if he were to mingle with other prisoners.

"We have unconfirmed grapevine reports that there are inmates that would want to kill him," said Phil Guthrie, information officer for the State Department of Corrections in Sacramento.

"Probably we have never had a more notorious case, if we get him. We have an obligation to keep people in but we have an equal obligation to protect them."

Sirhan's trial, under way since January, is expected to last at least another week. A penalty trial will follow if he is convicted of first-degree murder.

Anticipating Sirhan's eventual arrival, prison officials have ordered preparation of quarters on the third tier of one end of the maximum security cell block.

Guthrie said Sirhan would live in one 6-by 9-foot cell containing a bed, sink, toilet, writing stand and perhaps a couple of shelves.

The cell next to it, containing chairs, a table and possibly a television set, will be a visiting area where Sirhan, denied the usual facilities, will receive relatives or attorneys.

A shower will be installed in a third cell, across a corridor. Sirhan's food will be prepared in a small alcove.

Guthrie said officials had not decided whether to connect the living and visiting cells or to let the prisoner use the present doors.

Plea: "We can operate it any way that seems humane and suitable when we see how Sirhan reacts to his surroundings," Guthrie said.

If the jury decrees that Sirhan must die for Kennedy's murder, the usual procedure would be to transfer him to San Quentin, but Guthrie said prison officials would ask that he be sent to Vacaville.

If Sirhan ends up in the special quarters being prepared for him, it may be his home for years.

"We think he would have to be held under tight security for a long time," Guthrie said. "We hope that it would be

possible, in time, to take him out of this confinement and put him in suitable facilities."

He disputed reports that Sirhan was to receive red carpet treatment.