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MEMPHIS, Tenn. AP - Amid published reports that James Earl Ray will plead guilty and accept a 99-year sentence for the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the judge for Ray's trial has granted him a hearing Monday morning.

Beyond a terse announcement from Criminal Court Judge Preston Battle that the hearing had been granted and that newsmen accredited to cover the trial should arrive early, there was no official indication of what would happen.

The Huntsville, Ala., Times reported in Friday's editions that Ray, charged with murdering King, would plead guilty in exchange for a 99-year sentence instead of a possible death penalty.

The Times quoted what it called a source close to the case as saying the guilty plea is "the only

way Ray

can escape the death sentence."

"It's none of your business," replied Ray's lawyer, Percy Foreman of Houston, Tex., to a question on Friday's developments. State officials would say nothing.

The hearing is set for 9:30 a.m., and newsmen accredited to cover Ray's trial scheduled April 7, were asked to come to press room facilities an hour and a half beforehand.

Judge Battle had issued strict orders against pretrial publicity by any of the principals in the case—and has already held several persons in contempt of the order, among them two Memphis newsmen and Ray's biographer, William Bradford Huie.

King was assassinated last April 4 after he came here to lead a demonstration in behalf of striking city garbage workers.

Ray is accused of shooting King from a rooming house opposite the Lorraine Motel, where King was standing on a balcony.

Since his capture in London after a worldwide manhunt,

Ray has been held here in a specially armored, air-conditioned cell under tight security.

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