

## Shahid Azmi's parting gift to his 26/11 client

By ANAND HOLLA | Apr 1, 2010, 02:01 AM IST

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▶ With the trial coming to a close on Wednesday, three crucial points raised and highlighted by Azmi during his earlier cross-examination of witnesses will go a long way in deciding Ansari's fate as Azmi had drilled holes in the prosecution's case where it mattered.

Few minutes before pulling curtains on the trial, judge Tahaliyani raised four questions about the loopholes in the prosecution case over its claim that Fahim Ansari and Sabahuddin Shaikh had prepared hand-made maps to assist the ten terrorists who attacked the city. (see box) Interestingly, of these four queries, three were related to what Azmi had pointed out during earlier proceedings.

### Raising doubts over witness's credibility

The prosecution's story is that Ansari made maps of the city and handed it over to co-accused Shaikh in Nepal in January 2008. In turn, Shaikh allegedly handed over the maps to key conspirator Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi in Pakistan, who then handed it to the terrorists. Special public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam had examined witness Nooruddin Shaikh who said that he met Ansari in Nepal and saw him hand over the maps to Shaikh. Azmi had then ruthlessly grilled Nooruddin, seeking some proof of his visit to Nepal, which Nooruddin couldn't manage to present. From questioning Nooruddin's criminal antecedents to his credibility, Azmi brought on record some points that raised doubts over Nooruddin's claims of having met Ansari.

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### No blood stains on map

Perhaps the strongest point of defence raised for Ansari was Azmi questioning Fahim Ansari, accused the prosecution why the map recovered from slain terrorist Abu Ismail's cargo in the 26/11 case trouser's right pocket bore no blood-stains, creases or folds. "His clothes were completely bloodied, especially waist down. How could the police recover the map, spotless and uncreased?" Azmi had questioned over the mystery of the squeaky-clean map.

Even as the court staff grimaced and the judge asked him to wear gloves, Azmi picked up Ismail's bloodied clothes and underwear with bare hands and showed it to the court. Shahid argued that there was no way the map could have been recovered unstained, indicating that the map was prepared and planted by the police.

Shahid's brother Khalid, who is assisting Ansari's new lawyer R B Mokashi, said, "Shahid bhai would work till 2 am, 3 am on Ansari's case, because he believed Ansari was innocent. Even days before his demise, he had found something incriminating in Ansari's case which he believed would help in his acquittal. But Shahid has truly kept Ansari's defence groundwork in place, so the verdict will depend a lot on his sheer hard work."

### four Questions, Evasive Answers

Special judge M L Tahaliyani asked special public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam

Q1: Has crime branch any proof of Nooruddin having crossed the Nepal border, or a border stamp as evidence?

A1: "There is no evidence sir," replied Nikam.

Q2: Whether or not the map allegedly found in the pocket of slain gunman Abu Ismail, was sent for forensic tests to determine if there were any bloodstains that belonged to him?

A2: Nikam again replied in negative.

Q3: Why would the accused use hand-made maps when Google maps are available? I don't think these maps can help better than the maps available worldwide.

A3: Nikam said that only the conspirators would know why they preferred the hand-made over the ones available freely.

Q4: Were different pens used by the witness while writing the panchnama?

A4: Nikam said that it's not such a big deal and the pen must have died out in the middle of writing the panchnama.

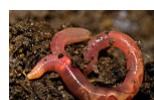
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