

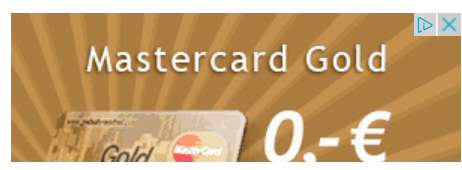
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Shahid Azmi shooting: Lawyers point fingers at establishment

Saturday, 13 February 2010 - 12:44am IST | Place: Mumbai | Agency: dna

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Bharat Nepali, close aide of underworld don Chhota Rajan, emerges as the prime suspect.

Who killed Shahid Azmi? While clear clues are still absent a day after the high-profile criminal lawyer was shot dead at his Kurla office, some in the legal fraternity and inner circle believe he was bumped off for being 'anti-establishment' and 'anti-police'.

Pegging his argument on the 'motive' behind the crime, senior Supreme Court lawyer Prashant Bhushan alleged that the only people who could have had a motive in getting rid of Azmi were the police. "Shahid is the only lawyer who had the maximum cases showing that the police were fabricating evidence," Bhushan said.


The anti-establishment theory gained credence late on Thursday night after Bharat Nepali, a gangster, reportedly owned up to the killing. Nepali is a close aide of underworld don Chhota Rajan.


The Rajan gang is known to target people who have an image of being 'anti-establishment' or 'anti-national'.

The Mumbai crime branch is also looking at the possibility of Nepali having ordered and masterminded the killing. A crime branch officer who is part of the probe team said the sophistication with which the killing was executed indicates that it was not the handiwork of a local or small-time criminal. "Imported weapons were used in the execution. Only underworld gangs like those of Rajan and Dawood Ibrahim are known to use imported weapons in killings," the officer said.


"We have registered a case of murder. We found four empty cartridges at the place of the offence. We are investigating all possible angles to ascertain the exact motive behind the


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murder," said senior police inspector Vijay Bagve of Kurla police station. He added that Azmi had registered a complaint against the Ravi Poojari gang on October 19, 2006, stating that the gang had threatened to kill him.

Joint commissioner of police, crime, Rakesh Maria was noncommittal. "We have received a few leads in the case and the investigation is on the right track." He refused to comment further on the case.

Thirty-two-year-old Azmi, who was the defence lawyer for [26/11](#) accused Faheem Ansari, was involved in a number of contentious cases that pitted him against the state and the police. "This can't be an ordinary murder. Azmi did not have enmity with anyone," said P Sebastian, human rights lawyer.

Sebatian said there was no reason why the underworld would want to eliminate him. "He didn't come in their way. They would not get involved. It is a way to silence people who fight for justice," he added.

Meanwhile, the police, based on the first-hand information provided by 23-year-old Inder Singh, Azmi's peon, have prepared and released the sketch of one of the suspected assassins.

In his complaint, Inder Singh, who is an eye-witness in the case, reportedly stated that three persons, aged between 25 and 30, entered Azmi's office posing as clients. They opened fire immediately after meeting Azmi. Singh, who was waiting outside, rushed into the office, but was threatened at gun-point by the assailants. The trio left in a hurry.

(With inputs from Dayanand Kamath)

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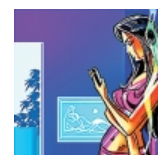
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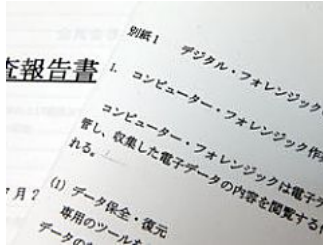


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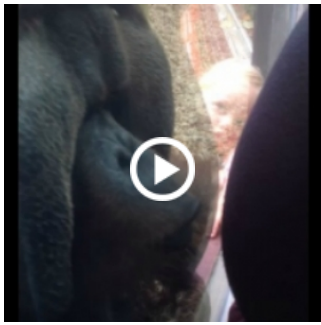
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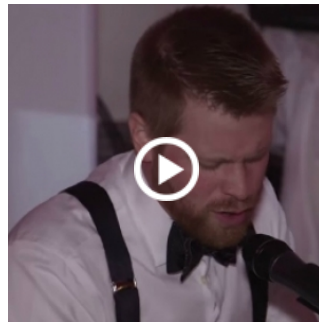
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