

Revisiting the Altantuya crime scene
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COMMENT Nine years on and three weeks after the final Federal Court decision, public speculation as to the motive for the murder of Mongolian national Altantuya Shaariibuu has refused to die down.

And now, added to this is the interview political analyst Abdul Razak Baginda gave to The Malaysian Insider last week where his statements defending Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak over Altantuya's murder have instead raised more questions.

This is the second time Abdul Razak - the third accused charged six years ago with abetment to murder Altantuya - has defended Najib who is a close acquaintance of his.

The first was during a press conference in November 2009 after his acquittal without his defence being called by the Shah Alam High Court, when he emphatically said Najib was not involved in the Altantuya murder plot.

In his most recent interview, the political analyst likened Chief Inspector Azilah Hadri and Corporal Sirul Azhar Umar' actions to those of other rogue cops who have been found liable for death in custody cases. Azilah and Sirul were last month given the death penalty for the murder of Altantuya.

Blown to bits

Abdul Razak maintains her murder is a straightforward case but his comments on rogue cops has irked Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar who responded that the public would never know why the two elite police officers killed her.

The IGP's response, in turn, has been criticised by DAP parliamentary leader and Gelang Patah MP, Lim Kit Siang, who said the top cop was committing "dereliction of duty" by not revealing the truth behind the murder.

This led to Khalid to retort on Sunday that the motive for Altantuya's murder had indeed been established by the cops but was not revealed during Azilah's and Sirul's trial by the prosecution. He added he was not empowered to reveal it post-conviction.

Having covered numerous murder cases in the courts, I can say that in the majority of instances, motive is normally established. However, in Altantuya's case, it was not revealed by the prosecution throughout the entire duration of the trial.

For this case, it can certainly be said that her killing was pre-meditated as she was shot first and her body was then blown to bits with the intention of erasing all evidence of the murder.

Bright, sunny day

I remember that unforgettable day during the trial when all three accused and the court visited the macabre crime scene in Shah Alam.

This visit came after DPP Tun Abdul Majid Tun Hamzah (now deputy solicitor-general) asked Shah Alam High Court judge Mohd Zaki Yasin whether the court would like to inspect the murder scene at Puncak Alam.

Prior to that, the court was shown the deceased's bone fragments which had been recovered from the scene of the crime.

The court visited the crime scene on the afternoon of July 17, 2007, nine months after the murder.

Some 60 journalists - including those from the international corps - decided to go to the crime scene early with their photographers. From the main road of what is now Persiaran Mokhtar Dahari, we took a right turn.

There were various stalls going about their businesses as we drove along the road and parked our cars up ahead at a foothill.

It was a bright sunny day and some who did not have four-wheel drive vehicles decided to walk up the hill while others with motorcycles rode up.

I (then attached to a mainstream newspaper) fortunately managed to hitch a ride in a colleague's 4WD as the hill slope leading to the crime scene was quite steep.

Skies darken ominously

When we arrived at the hilltop, we saw a clearing with burn marks on the ground and some sort of blue sash tied to a tree. There were various other ornaments placed there including a rosary crucifix and Buddhist prayer items.

The trees and their leaves of the surrounding area still showed burn signs as a result of the explosion that tore apart Altantuya and that probably resulted in a small fire.

Just as the various parties - the judge, the prosecutors and lawyers and the accused - from the court were about to arrive, the skies began to darken ominously with thunderclouds.

From what had been a bright and sunny day, the weather rather rapidly changed to one of thunder, lightning and pounding rain by the time everyone gathered at the site at 3pm.

Reporters ran helter-skelter seeking whatever shelter they could find under the cover of the secondary forest while the prosecutors proceeded to show judge Zaki - who had an

umbrella-wielding assistant - how the murder occurred.

The prosecutors showed the exact place where Altantuya was shot as she squatted and the nearby location where explosives were placed around her dead body before being detonated.

All this was done under the watchful eyes of the judge, defence counsel and accused Abdul Razak, Azilah and Sirul - the latter two sporting hoodies to hide their faces.

The pouring rain continued right until the whole entourage was beginning to leave the scene. And as we were leaving the place and going downhill, the rain suddenly stopped and it was sunny again.

An ordinary murder?

For me, the visit was memorable as it was my first and only time visiting the Altantuya murder crime scene.

It was also rather unforgettable as later that evening, we were startled to find out that one of the prosecutors who had briefed the judge at the murder scene had met with an accident as her car skidded and overturned later that day. Luckily, she escaped unhurt.

With answers still lacking as to the motive for this apparently senseless murder, what happened on July 17, 2007 will continue to be in the public's consciousness as people ponder as to whether this was truly an "ordinary" murder case (according to Abdul Razak).

The other ponderable is why did Abdul Razak's wife Mazlinda Makhzan, a former magistrate, cry out in open court that "my husband does not want to be the prime minister" as her husband was being charged with abetment to murder Altantuya?

At that time in 2006, Najib was the deputy prime minister and he has since repeatedly denied any involvement in the murder whatsoever.

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