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AL QAEDA KILLS ITS MENTOR & GODFATHER?

by B. Raman

On May 30, 2004, unidentified terrorists riding a motorbike shot dead Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai, the chief of the hardline Deobandi Binori madrasa of Karachi and one of his sons and a nephew as he was returning to his house, located just across the road from the madrasa. A week later, the Karachi Police and the Pakistani intelligence agencies are still groping in the dark in their attempts to identify the killers and establish the motive for the assassination.

2. As it normally happens in Pakistan after each such terrorist strike, there have been speculations galore in the media as well as amongst the public. Sections of the local media, including the prestigious "Daily Times" of Lahore, have projected it as a possible act of retaliation by Shia extremists for the suicide-bombing of the Haideri Masjid by Sunni terrorists in the beginning of last month, in which 18 Shias were killed. The investigation into that incident so far is reported to have established that the suicide-bomber was a police Constable, who was a member of the anti-Shia Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LEJ).

3. Those, who suspect the Shia extremists belonging to the Sipah Mohammad (SM) to have been responsible for his assassination, have projected the suicide-bombing in the Ali Raza Imambargah of Karachi within 24 hours of Shamzai's murder as an act of retaliation by the LEJ for his murder. Over 20 Shias were killed in this incident.

4. However, many colleagues of Shamzai in the Binori madrasa have refrained from blaming the Shia extremists for the assassination and condemned attempts to project it as the outcome of the growing Shia-Sunni divide in

Pakistan in general and in Karachi in particular.

5. They blame the US for the assassination and accuse the provincial administration of Sindh, in which the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) of Altaf Hussain now plays a predominant role, of acting as the stooge of the US and facilitating his murder by not providing him with effective security despite the fact that he was in receipt of increasing threats to his life since the beginning of this year. Their suspicions are shared by some of the leaders and many of the cadres of the mainstream Islamic political parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI) of Qazi Hussain Ahmed, Jamiat-ul-Ulema Islam (JUI) of Maulana Fazlur Rahman, a splinter group of the JUI led by Maulana Samiul Haq etc which constitute the six-party religious coalition called the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA).

6. In fact, in their First Information Report (FIR) lodged with the local police after the assassination, the office-bearers of the madrasa wanted to name the MQM Governor of Sindh Ishratul Ibad as their principal suspect, but they were persuaded by other religious leaders not to do so without evidence lest their action further spoil the atmosphere in Karachi and lead to acts of violence against the Mohajirs (migrants from India), whose interests the MQM represents. Pakistan's military dictator, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, is himself a Mohajir and has been under attack by the religious extremist elements since October, 2002, for having rehabilitated the MQM and inducted its nominees into positions of power in Karachi in return for its support for the Government nominated by him in Islamabad and for his continuing as the Army chief in spite of his having crossed the age of superannuation. These elements accuse Musharraf and the MQM of acting in tandem in promoting US interests in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

7. Mufti Shamzai's real age is not known. Some say he was 52, but others say he was actually 70. In Pakistan's religious hierarchy, he occupied the second position after Mufti Rafiuddin Usmani, who is the chief Mufti of Pakistan, but he was better known than Usmani in Pakistan as well as in other countries of the Islamic world and had a much larger following in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

8. The Binori madrasa came to prominence in 1979 when the late Zia-ul-Haq nominated its then chief and founder Maulana Yusuf Binori as the Chairman of the Council of

Islamic Ideology. After the Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan towards the end of 1979, Shamzai in association with other mullas of Pakistan issued a fatwa calling for a jihad against the USSR.

9. Mufti Shamzai was then the blue-eyed Mulla of not only Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), but also of the USA's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Saudi intelligence and played an active role in the recruitment of Muslims from Pakistan and other Islamic countries and training them with the help of Pakistan's military-intelligence establishment for waging a jihad against the Soviet troops.

10. He became close to Zia, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, Gen. Mohammad Aziz, presently Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Gen. (retd) Muzaffar Usmani, former Corps Commander, Karachi and Vice-Chief of Army Staff, and three former jihadi chiefs of the ISI, namely, Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul, Lt. Gen. Javed Nasir and Lt. Gen. Mahmood Ahmed.

11. During his career, he had issued nearly 2000 fatwas. In the 1970s and the 1980s, his fatwas were mainly directed against the USSR, India and Israel. After Osama bin Laden formed his International Islamic Front (IIF) in February, 1998, his fatwas became increasingly directed against the US. After the US-led coalition started its so-called war against terrorism in Afghanistan in October, 2001, he issued a fatwa calling upon the Muslims of the world to join the jihad against the US.

12. Shamzai was the mentor and godfather of Al Qaeda, the Taliban, the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and its militant wing the LEJ, the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM), the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI) and the Jaish-E-Mohammad (JEM). He was designated as the Patron-in-Chief of the JEM and was a member of the shoorah of Al Qaeda, the Taliban and the JUI of Maulana Fazlur Rahman.

13. Shamzai, who strongly backed Musharraf's seizure of power in October, 1999, became increasingly critical of him after the General decided to co-operate with the US in its operations against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. He and his followers helped the leaders of the Taliban, including its Amir Mulla Omar, to escape from Afghanistan into Pakistan and take sanctuary there.

14. It was reported in 2002 that during the US operations against Al Qaeda in Tora Bora, the followers of Shamzai

managed to evacuate Osama bin Laden, who had sustained a sharpnel injury, to the Binori complex in Karachi where he was treated till August,2002, by serving and retired medical doctors of the Pakistan Army. He later left the madrasa.

15. Post-9/11, Shamzai promoted the formation of a clandestine organisation called Brigade 313 (the number of warriors in the battle of Badr at the time of the Holy Prophet) to wage jihad against Western nationals and interests and Christians in Pakistani territory. It consisted of the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LET), the JEM, the HUM, the HUM (al-Alami, meaning international), the HUJI and the LEJ.

16. All the members of this Brigade are also members of the IIF. At his instance, members of this Brigade infiltrated into Iraq to join the jihad against the US troops there.

17. Shamzai was the principal exponent of International Islamism which holds, firstly, that the loyalty of a Muslim is first to his religion and then only to the country of which he is resident or a citizen; secondly, that Muslims do not recognise national frontiers and hence have the right and the obligation to wage jihad anywhere to protect their religion; and, thirdly, that the Muslims have the right and the religious obligation to acquire and use weapons of mass destruction to protect their religion, if necessary.

18. These ideas strongly influenced the thinking of bin Laden. Since the beginning of this year, there have been reports of differences in Al Qaeda and the IIF over the action of some sections of Al Qaeda and the IIF in targeting the Saudi ruling family and its administration. Shamzai, who had close contacts with the Saudi ruling family and religious clerics and was in receipt of large funds from them, was reportedly increasingly critical of Al Qaeda leadership for allegedly weakening the jihad against the USA and Israel by targeting the Saudi authorities and thereby losing their support for the international jihad. Al Qaeda elements were accusing him of letting himself be bought by the Saudi authorities and supporting the pro-US apostate regimes of the Islamic world.

19. Did these differences have anything to do with his assassination? If so, did Al Qaeda or the IIF have any role in his assassination? These questions are quite

relevant, but remain without definitive answers at present.

*(The writer is Additional Secretary (retd), Cabinet Secretariat, Govt. of India, and, presently, Director, Institute For Topical Studies, Chennai, and Distinguished Fellow and Convenor, Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Chennai Chapter.
E-mail: corde@vsnl.com)*

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