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Fake encounter: how Sohrabuddin Sheikh was killed

Did Kausar Bi, wife of Sohrabuddin Sheikh, who was allegedly shot in a fake encounter on November 26, 2005, near Ahmedabad, know the fate that awaited her husband?

Yes, said a highly-placed source in the Gujarat Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Kausar Bi definitely knew what to expect after her husband was separated from her at a Gandhinagar farmhouse, where they had been locked up, the source told *Hindustan Times*. The couple had been pulled off a bus the previous night.

The trail leading to their deaths has not been completely reconstructed by the CID. But using statements from witnesses — an inter-state bus owner, its cleaner, drivers and commuters, besides constables — the interim report submitted by a CID team led by Inspector General of Police Geetha Johri at least partially rebuilds the episode.

"It's good work," said Deputy Inspector General of Police and present CID investigation in-charge Rajneesh Rai. He was recently asked to get all investigative procedures — arrests, scientific investigation — cleared by his boss, Additional Director General of Police OP Mathur.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court on Tuesday deferred to Thursday its verdict on shifting the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation.

Eyewitness accounts in Johri's report are damning, sources said. A statement by Constable Ajay Parmar, who said he was present when Sohrabuddin was shot, says: "On November 26 at 4 am, Anti-Terrorism Squad officers from Gujarat, including DG Vanzara and RK Pandayan, and Rajasthan Superintendent of Police MN Dinesh... were present at a place between Ahmedabad circle and Vishala circle toll points.

The report says: "constable Ajay Parmar was asked to bring a Hero Honda motorcycle lying in the backyard of an ATS office here. Sohrabudin was also brought here. A sub-inspector of Rajasthan police rode the bike for a short distance and jumped off it. As it fell, Sohrabuddin was pulled out of the car and thrown on the road. Four police inspectors fired eight rounds from their service pistols. Vanzara then asked Parmar to take Sohrabuddin to the civil hospital."

The report also says police officials from Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan were involved in the episode. But Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy said on Tuesday that no police official from his state was involved.

The CID report says Sohrabudin and Kausar, along with a possible third victim, Tulsiram Prajapati, were intercepted in a bus going from

Hyderabad to Sangli by Gujarat ATS and Rajasthan police officers late on November 22 night. The couple were then kept locked in a room of the farmhouse called Disha at Jamiyatpura on the outskirts of Gandhinagar, owned by a certain Girish Patel — also a witness in the Johri report — from Nov 24 to 25.

"ATS officers led by Vanzara asked for favours in this encounter as in the past like loaning of cars and houses. He was rarely refused," said a senior police official.

After Sohrabuddin was taken away, Kausar Bi was removed from the farmhouse on the morning of November 26 on the request of the owner. She was last seen in a white Maruti car with plainclothes policemen from Gujarat, the report says.

The Johri report and the current CID investigations are silent about what could have happened to Kausar in the next two days. The Johri report refers to a statement of constable Parmar, posted as personal assistant of arrested IPS officer RK Pandiyan, as saying Kausar was not seen after November 25 and that he had heard she had been burnt and killed in the mountains near Ilol, Vanzara's native village.

CID investigators claim that Kausar died on November 28. Her body was burnt and disposed off by ATS officers, they have admitted. They say that she was most likely transferred to another farmhouse, Arham bungalow on Koba-Adlaj Road near Gandhinagar, for the last two days of her life.

CID investigators are silent on abuse and on how she died. The report is in four parts, based on preliminary investigations between September 2006 to January 2007.

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