Attempt to uncover truth of activist's death

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TIMOL: A QUEST FOR JUSTICE
By Imtiaz Cajee (STE Publishers)
Reviewed by JIMMY MATYU

MANY horrifying stories in newspapers have been written about political activists dying in detention in the custody of the notorious former security police of the apartheid regime in the country.

But Imtiaz Cajee's book, *Timol: A Quest For Justice*, on his celebrated uncle, Ahmed Timol, is both well researched and written.

He has explicitly recorded the chilling tale of Timol, who 33 years ago, plunged to his death at Johannesburg's once-notorious John Vorster Square police station. It was afterwards, at this same police station, that the security police coined the despicable phrase: "Indians can fly".

The foreword to the book was penned by President Thabo Mbeki, who studied with Timol in Russia.

On October 27, 1971, Timol, aged 29, became the 22nd detainee to die in detention at the hands of callous security policemen who were only accountable to the then justice minister John Vorster, later prime minister.

Cajee, 38, who was only five years old at the time, still has fond memories of his uncle, and in this book he has set out to search for the truth.

Speaking from Pretoria, Cajee, a government employee, said he still wanted to find out more about the life of his uncle, why he joined the SA Communist Party and why he left London and returned to South Africa in 1970 to establish underground structures.

Ahmed Timol (left) and his political mentor, Essop Pahad, stand in front of North End House, West Kensington.

He admits that Timol told his mother, Hawa, that she was the reason for his coming to South Africa, but Cajee seems to have other thoughts about it.

In his quest for justice and truth, Cajee said he had phoned some of the police involved in his uncle's detention and gruelling interrogation.

Timol, who had been under security police surveillance for some time and his former student, Salim Essop, were arrested at a roadblock in Coronationville at 11.10pm on October 22, 1971, and detained.

Timol (left) addresses the farewell party for the graduates at the Training Institute for Indian Teachers in 1963 as principal J J Smith looks on.

Three days later in the biggest swoop countrywide since 1964, the homes of 115 – among them, two bishops, 17 priests, 17 university lecturers and teachers, six journalists and 62 students were raided and 115 people were detained, all linked by police to leaflets allegedly found in the car of Timol and Essop.

Cajee said one of the policemen was Captain Johannes Hendrik Gloy, who was with Timol minutes before he fell to his death.

Timol's parents mourn for their son after he died in detention.

He had spoken to Gloy who, at first, seemed prepared to co-operate, but later refused to comment and said the finding of the inquest should be accepted. Cajee made it clear that he supported the TRC, the building of a new democratic non-racist South Africa, reconciliation and moving forward, but the death of his uncle, which had made a great impact on his life, could not just be forgotten.

The family felt let down by the TRC, which had not subpoenaed any policemen for full disclosure, though it had names. The original verdict had been that he had committed suicide by jumping from the 10th floor.

"I have dedicated this book to my uncle Ahmed, to all the detainees who died in police detention and to all those who have been tortured by the apartheid police.

"In my quest for justice, the purpose of this book is to record the life of my uncle. It is to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to book and the findings of the inquest magistrate are reversed," he said.

From 1963 to 1990 there were 73 recorded deaths in police detention, 19 of these in the Eastern Cape.

Former president Nelson Mandela unveiled a plaque at the renaming of Rodepoort High School in 1999 where cricketer and soccer enthusiast Timol once taught.

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