

32 years since Timol's death in detention

27 October marked the 32nd anniversary of the death of anti-apartheid activist, Ahmed Timol, who died in police detention at the former John Vorster Square Police Station in Johannesburg.

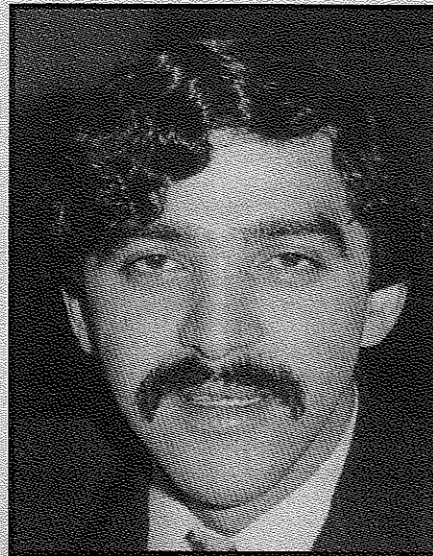
Timol's death at the time made local and international headlines and there was a world outcry of protest, including at the United Nations. It was widely suggested that he was either dropped alive from the 10th floor window or died while being interrogated and his body then dumped out the window.

Death by torture was an established pattern in a number of celebrated detention cases in those days.

Timol was teaching at the Roodepoort Indian High School when he left for London in 1966 to stay with close friends Essop Pahad, now minister in the Presidency, and Aziz Pahad now Deputy Foreign Minister.

He was then selected to go for political training in the former Soviet Union with a young Thabo Mbeki in 1969. After returning from training Timol came back to South Africa in 1970 to setup underground structures for the banned Communist Party.

Working undetected for over 20 months, he was arrested at a police roadblock with banned literature on 22 October 1971. Five days after his arrest, Timol fell to his death. In addition, police beat up his comrade Mohamed Salim Essop, so badly that he had to be hospitalised.



At that time detainees were held in conditions of total isolation, with no access to family, friends, lawyers or independent doctors. The courts were expressly precluded from interfering in detention matters.

The magisterial inquest findings found no one responsible for Timol's death and concluded that he had committed suicide.

Timol's late mother, Hawa, testified at the TRC hearings in 1996 about gruesome marks and bruises found on Ahmed's body which could not all be traced to his fall and which experts said were incurred after his detention.

Speaking in Gugerati she told the commission: "They hit my son tremendously and killed him. My son was a teacher and well liked by his pupils. He would not kill himself. I can't be expected to forgive at this stage."

Now that the TRC has concluded its work, exhaustive research has been conducted and has uncovered fascinating new insight and evidence into what may have led and caused Timol's death.

The memory of Ahmed Timol and all other activists who died at the hands of the security police must never be forgotten. Where possible, those responsible for have not sought amnesty must be taken to court.

Ahmed Timol, a pillar in the nonracial liberation movement was cut down in the bloom of his life. He was not even 30 yet.

The nephew of Ahmed Timol, Imtiaz Cajee is writing a book in memory of his late uncle. It is expected to be published next year.

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