

Nephew's bid to solve puzzle of 1971 death

State archive may reveal how detainee perished

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AHMED Timol died so many different ways. A policeman pushed him from a 10th-storey window; interrogators beat the activist to a pulp and threw his lifeless body to the street below; he jumped.

Each cause of death weaved from hearsay and rumour as the decades passed, and the case grew colder.

But just maybe, buried in a state archive, is a document that tells what happened in room 1026 on October 27, 1971.

This is what Timol's nephew Imtiaz Cajee believes, and drives him in his search for the truth.

But finding this document is proving difficult; bureaucracy, he believes, is stonewalling him. The state appears reluctant to relinquish apartheid secrets.

Recently Cajee marked the 41st anniversary of his uncle's death with the launch of a website dedicated to his memory. The website has another purpose: the hope that it might encourage someone who knows what happened to Timol to come forward.

Cajee has written a book, *Timol: A Quest for Justice*, about his uncle and now he plans a second.

His second book is to be titled *Timol - Quest for Truth*, and it will attempt to tell the story of his uncle's death. But it's been hard, with him encountering resistance from Timol's former community, while former security force members remain tight-lipped about the killing.

He suspects the silence of some in the community is because of a fear of information emerging that might expose former police informers. Cajee hardly knew his uncle



STAGED SLAYING? Ahmed Timol, who died in police detention.

— he was five when Timol died. Later, he would learn about his uncle from the news clippings the family kept and the tales his grandmother told.

“Did you pray for Ahmed?”, my grandmother would say,” recalls Cajee.

In 1967 Timol, then 26, left South Africa for London. The young teacher was active in anti-apartheid politics for a while.

After a year studying in Russia, where one of his classmates was Thabo Mbeki, Timol returned to South Africa. It was a dangerous move.

“He didn't have to go, he could have stayed in London and studied, but he went,” says Cajee.

Timol returned to South Africa to set up underground structures for the SACP.

He resumed teaching at the Roodepoort Indian High School while secretly distributing pamphlets and attending meetings.

Then, on the night of October 22, 1971, Timol and his friend Salim Essop were stopped at a roadblock. A police sergeant claimed he found pamphlets in the boot of Timol's yellow Anglia. Timol ended up at John Vorster Square, and it is here where things got murky.

At an inquest into Timol's

death the following year, the police claimed the detainee was sitting at a desk in room 1026 when he asked to go to the toilet. Timol then side-stepped a police guard, rushed to the window, opened it and jumped.

There was speculation he was pushed. A standing joke among security branch police after the incident was that they now knew “Indians can't fly”. John Vorster Square became known as Timol Heights.

Timol's mother told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission her son's body showed signs of torture, with fingernails pulled and an eye gouged out.

But Cajee believes there might have been a different scenario that led to his death. He has interviewed witnesses who saw the body fall. They were struck at how quickly police cordoned off the area.

And there was the testimony of a detainee who was in John Vorster Square at the time of Timol's death.

Hassen Jooma told Cajee how, after he was arrested and taken to John Vorster Square, he was instructed to clean a room with a bucket and broom. The room contained tufts of long hair, clotted with blood.

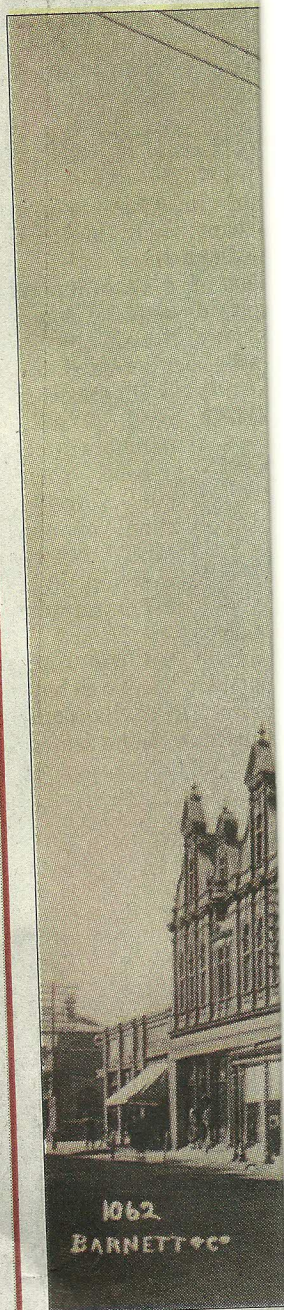
Later Jooma came to suspect that this was Timol's hair.

“I suspect he was dead already,” says Cajee. “That he was thrown from the building and the police were waiting at the bottom to cordon everything off.”

A staged death to clear the police of any wrongdoing.

But the tell-all piece of evidence, believes Cajee, is documentation he has been told still exists.

Cajee wants to approach the information regulator to help gain access to the archives, so that Timol may finally be allowed to die from a single cause of death.



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A WHOPPING R12 million has been spent on hotels and expenses for the national convention team in Limpopo.

The government spent between December last and September on fewer than 30 officials since five provincial departments were merged under national administration.

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