

A survivor of the shoot-out and killings at a Karachi-based NGO two months ago remembers all he can about the incident while still not knowing the fate of his colleagues

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By Robin Fernandez



An eyewitness account

follow-up

A 25-year-old male worker who survived the September 25 shooting at the offices of a Christian-run non-governmental organisation does not know that his colleagues are dead. "He

Sharif distinctly remembers seeing three men peering into the glass window of the office front-door. As soon as they appeared, the visitor took out a gun and aimed it at him. He then moved towards the door and let his cohorts in. There were four assailants in all and one by one they herded the Idara staff into the reading room. One of the men opened my desk drawers and pulled out some muskling tape. The same tape was used to cover the mouths of the Idara workers.

keeps asking about his office colleagues and we keep giving one excuse or the other, says the brother of Robin

The assailants knocked out Sharif and the others with chloroform. "That is the last

thing I remember," he added. According to Sharif, two of the attackers were wearing T-shirts and jeans and their partners were clad in more formal wear—regular shirts and trousers.

When police officials sought Robin Sharif's assistance in preparing sketches of the killers, they were unsure about his mental faculties. A senior police officer began by asking Robin if he remembered him. But Robin just stared at him blankly and said, "I don't know you." The police official repeated the question again but Robin's answer remained the same.

The policeman shook his head and told his colleagues standing nearby that Robin Sharif was probably not all right. But then a few seconds later Robin suddenly smiled and said, "Aren't you the same officer who asked me for a description of the robbers who entered the Idara office in 1998?"

"Yes, I am," replied the police official, elated that the survivor could remember an event that took place almost four years ago. Later Sharif helped prepare the sketches of three assailants who gunned down seven charity workers. Once the police had

left, Sharif joked that he didn't expect the police to track down the suspects. "They ask me now, as before, to help them prepare the sketches but I doubt whether the suspects will ever be caught," he said.

Still, his testimony has cleared many of the doubts created by the only other witness, Robin Piranditta, who is still in shock. "We can safely assume that Piranditta was freed after the police were reassured by the other Robin that the former wasn't a collaborator," a Christian charity worker said. At first, the police treated Piranditta with

suspicion as his testimony was recorded 136 times. "Each time Piranditta gave a slightly different account," the charity worker quoted a police official as saying. At the rate, the police investigators have given little or no credence to what he has told them.

Incapacitated by a bullet wound to the head, Sharif hasn't been able to offer more than a few bits of information. His condition has improved in the past six weeks, though he still can't walk or do without a small band of caregivers that is at his side all hours.

A bird's eyeview

Moon hoax

By N.A.Bhatti

The moon has intrigued mankind since times immemorial. People have venerated it and even worshipped it. The ancient Greeks had Diana, their goddess of the moon and hunting. Nearly every past civilisation and culture — Hindu, Chinese, Scandinavian, Saxon, Inca, Aztec, Maya, Egyptian — has had its moon deity.

I still remember, during my visits to my village as a kid, old women pointing to the full moon and saying to children: *O dekh, oay, o buddhee charkha kat di payee!* (Lo and behold, the old woman at the spinning wheel!). Chinese used to observe the Moon Festival. During a lunar eclipse, they used to let off strings of large deafening firecrackers to scare off the evil dragon trying to devour the moon.

In western culture, it was common to speak of the Man in the Moon. The word 'lunacy' has found a permanent place in the English language because of the old mistaken belief that periodic changes in the moon (*luna* in Latin) caused madness in human beings. It fell to the lot of Islam to sweep away such superstitions by declaring that, along with the sun, the moon was only a measure of time and a navigational aid. Since then, science and technology have made such spectacular advances as to boggle imagination. Human beings have not only physically visited the moon but have also sent exploratory spacecraft beyond it. Or have they?

They haven't! Who says so? Bart Sibre. And who in the name of the devil is Bart Sibre? Meet him, if you haven't done so already, in the AFP column 'Moon Fakers? Lunar missions fight hoax claim' (*The News*, November 11, 2002). Its introductory paragraph reads:

PARIS: Thirty years after Man first walked on the Moon, the lunar landings are struggling to shake off rumours that they were nothing but a monstrous hoax. To the vast majority of people, the six Apollo missions were among the most magnificent achievements of all time — and testimony from the astronauts, the lunar rock samples, photos and film footage prove the landings an indisputable fact. Not so for a tiny band of diardhs, who have made it their goal to expose the missions as a gigantic con, mainly aimed at persuading Moscow that America had beaten it in the race to the Moon.

According to Bart Sibre, a self-described investigative journalist, the astronauts never made it beyond Earth orbit. The goal was to fool the Soviet Union about US strategic ability during the height of the Cold War. The AFP report goes on to mention a French independent investigator, Philippe Lheureux, who is reported to have published a book 'Lumières sur la Lune' (Lights on the Moon) which insists that images released by NASA were doctored.

And how do we in Pakistan stand in the tussle between scientists and iconoclasts? History shows that scientists are liable to make mistakes, some of them very serious, but some priests in the west and maulvis in the east are guilty of much greater ignorance and obstinacy. Until recent times, Europeans held the geocentric theory of the universe and