

# Asia Sentinel

## The Murder of Altantuya Shaariibuu

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***Six years on, troubling questions remain about the Mongolian beauty's death, and who ordered it***

It will be six years tomorrow since bodyguards for now-Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak dragged the Mongolian translator and party girl Altantuya Shaariibuu out of a car in a patch of jungle near the Kuala Lumpur suburb of Shah Alam. As she begged for her life and apparently that of her unborn child, they knocked her unconscious, then shot her twice in the head.



Altantuya Shaariibuu, 1978-2006

That was Oct. 19, 2006. According to court testimony, Chief Inspector Azilah Hadri and Corporal Sirul Azhar Umar, members of the elite Unit Tindakan Khas, both assigned to Najib's office, then wrapped Altantuya's body in C4 plastic explosives and blew her up, possibly to mangle her remains so badly that the fetus would be destroyed.

Sirul Azhar was interrogated by police shortly after the murder was discovered. He was informed that anything he said could be held against him, in accordance with the law. In his cautioned statement, as his confession was called in Malaysia, he told authorities he and Azilah had been offered RM100,000 to kill the woman and her two companions, who were causing highly public embarrassment for Abdul Razak Baginda, Najib's best friend. The 28-year-old Mongolian woman, in a letter found after her death, wrote that she was sorry she had been blackmailing Razak Baginda, who had jilted her after a jet-setting whirl throughout Europe and Asia.

If French police records are to be believed, Razak Baginda was allegedly central to a massive bribery case in which a total of nearly €150 million in payments were steered to two Razak Baginda companies, Perimekar Sdn Bhd and Terasasi Hong Kong Ltd.

As Asia Sentinel reported earlier this year, records seized by the French police show that former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe were aware of the transactions. **Memos obtained by Asia Sentinel** show the

French expected at least part of the money to be steered to the United Malays National Organization, Malaysia's biggest ethnic political party.

Sirul's confession was never admitted in court despite its seeming legality. And, despite a 14-month trial, neither the prosecutors, the defense nor the judge asked who had offered the RM100,000 payment to the two men. Najib's chief of staff, Musa Safri, according testimony dispatched the two policemen to pick up Altantuya and her companions, who mercifully weren't around when the two murderers abducted Altantuya, or presumably they would have died with her. As nearly as can be determined from official records, Musa Safri was never questioned about the matter, nor was Najib.

This recounting is important because in recent weeks Najib's government has embarked on a concerted legal campaign to discredit a long string of political reform and independent news organizations who have kept the Altantuya story and others concerning corruption and political misdoings alive in Malaysia. Instead, the government and UMNO leaders have accused the reformers of being the tools of the opposition Pakatan Rakyat coalition, or of foreign powers, out to destabilize Malaysia. The presumptive foreign powers are shadowy ones, sometimes German, sometimes American, sometimes Israeli, sometimes unnamed. Enormously long blogs have been written calling into question the French documents, which were published by Asia Sentinel.

But whoever these foreign powers are, they are cast as out to hoodwink Malaysia's voters out of the government that is best for them in national elections to be held sometime next year, probably in April. This is an old story, peddled by a long string of disreputable governments across the world when reformers get too close, and it may hold sway again in Malaysia.

But there is one incontrovertible fact. Altantuya Shaariibuu is dead, and she appears to have been killed at the behest of someone with considerable clout in Kuala Lumpur. If her dying statement to Sirul Azhar, as he recounted it in his confession, is to be accepted, she appeared to have been carrying the baby of someone, perhaps high in power in Malaysia.

And, despite indignant denials from the powers that be, Altantuya appears to have had inside knowledge of the later events in France when Razak Baginda and Najib Tun Razak visited to deal with matters surrounding the purchase of Scorpene submarines from the French contractor DCN.

Although pro-government critics have denied she had ever visited France, according to testimony given by Abdul Razak when he was under investigation for ordering the two bodyguards to kill Altaantuya, he himself told investigators he traveled with her to France in 2005.

Records seized by French investigators from DCN, the defense contractor that sold

Malaysia the submarines, bear that out. According to French investigators' records, Abdul Razak Baginda and Altantuya met with **Jean Marie Boivin, the alleged French fixer** who helped to organize "commissions" for friends in high places to pick DCN's submarines on that same trip. Boivin arranged to pay for a jaunt by Altantuya and Abdul Razak to Macau.

Najib has sworn on the Quran that he never met Altantuya, although she was in France at the same time as he was, accompanying Najib's best friend, Abdul Razak Baginda. On June 11, 2005, Najib gave a press conference after having visited the site where the Scorpene submariners were being trained.

"As a maritime nation, (the) acquisition will give our navy the added capabilities," he told the media. Earlier, in the port city of Brest, Najib visited a naval base where Malaysian navy submariners were training, and, according to the log of an Australian submariner association, presented jackets made available by Perimekar – Abdul Razak Baginda's company – to the crew.

Back in Kuala Lumpur when it was realized that Altantuya was missing, her cousin lodged a police report and sought help from the Mongolian embassy in Bangkok. The Malaysian police found fragments of bone, later verified as hers, in forested land near Shah Alam. The honorary Mongolian consul in Malaysia was given a packet of pictures of Altantuya in Paris, apparently recovered from her hotel room. She had posed in front of the Louis Vuitton headquarters and a variety of other Paris sites. Altantuya's cousin said she had been shown a picture of the dead woman at a dinner with Najib. If it existed, it was not included in the packet made available to the Mongolian consul, who forwarded the rest of them to Asia Sentinel.

After the arrest of Razak Baginda and the two policemen, there ensued a carnival of a trial in a Malaysia high court, in which prosecutors were switched at the last minute; in which Abdul Razak Baginda was acquitted without having to put on a defense; in which nobody in Najib's office was called to testify about who offered to pay the RM100,000; in which Sirul's confession was never introduced, nor was he asked about any of the facts in it; in which nobody ever asked why immigration records for Altantuya and her two companions disappeared; why or how the two policemen were able to get their hands on C4 plastic explosives available only to the military in the bid to destroy her body. The honorary consul was never asked who gave him the pictures, nor if there others that might have shown more than just her.

On Feb. 3, 2009, Sirul pleaded with the court not to sentence him to death, describing himself as "a black sheep that has to be sacrificed" to protect unnamed people. "I have no reason to cause hurt, what's more to take the life of the victim in such a cruel manner .... I appeal to the court, which has the powers to determine if I live or die, not to sentence me so as to fulfill others' plans for me."

Eventually the two bodyguards were convicted and packed off to prison. They launched appeals, then other appeals. Their appeals were supposed to have been heard in

February this year, eight months ago. Mysteriously their appeals have been delayed. They were supposed to be heard in August. They have been delayed again, and the suspicion is that they will be delayed until after the next election, or perhaps forever.

Altantuya Shaariibuu continues to await justice. Birnam Wood still may come to Dunsinane.