EYEWITNESSES IN GOOL SPEAK: 'POLICE JOINED BSF MEN IN DHARAM MAYHEM'

KT NEWS SERVICE. Dated: 7/20/2013 12:30:12 AM

GOOL (Ramban), Jul 19: 17-year old Abdul Latif, who is by profession a shopkeeper in village Sangaldan, was offering Taraawi prayers in the hall of the Madrassa run by Qari Shabir in Jimbalan area of village Dharam on the outskirts of Gool, where four people were killed and over 40 others injured in firing by men in uniform yesterday.
He was all alone in the Madrassa hall. According to Qari Shabir, since Latif lives at a stone's throw away, it is he who looks after the Madrassa during the night hours.
Shabir said that Abdul Latif belongs to Gujjar family and has been acting as night watchman of the Madrassa for the last many years.
Qari Shabir informed that since holidays were on, even he was not in the Madrassa when the incident of alleged desecration of Holy Quran took place. Latif, who had just arrived at the gate of the Madrassa after offering funeral prayers of a young man killed in yesterday's firing incident, did not miss a moment in narrating the sequence of events.
Latif said, "I was offering Taraawi prayers all alone. Suddenly, I heard a bang at the door and saw four uniformed jawans of BSF entering the Madrassa hall. Within seconds of their entry inside the Madrassa hall, the BSF personnel caught hold of me and began asking questions about the presence of militants in the Madrassa." He also said "They termed Madrassa as hideout of militants and said that they had seen some militants roaming there."
"Even before I could I reply, they broke the shelf where some Islamic books alongwith a 'holy book of Quran' had been kept," Latief said. He alleged that the BSF personnel

tore apart the holy book while showering choicest of abuses on him. On seeing the holy book being torn part, Latief maintains that he could not tolerate it and this resulted in him entering into an argument with the BSF personnel.

“This irked them and they dragged me out of the Madrassa hall. I began crying and yelling at the top of my voice. A tipper which was passing by stopped and the driver came down to see what was happening. By that time, my mother Mumtaz Begum too had arrived at the site of the incident. Sensing trouble, they let me off,” said Latief.

Taking extraordinary precaution, Latief said that he rang up the concerned police station as well as the SHO Aijaz Ahmed Wani.

Fearing for his life, Latief said that he had called up the village people and even rang up Imam of nearby mosques. Putting a virtual question mark on the BSF story of Latief having made announcements on the loudspeaker, Kashmir Times team found out that there was no public address system in the Madrassa where the incident took place. Besides, it would have taken Latief 20 minutes to reach the mosque and ask people to gather for protest at the site of incident.

By this time, BSF personnel had returned to their camp which is around one kilometer from the Madrassa. A bridge and a nallah falls between the two locations. However, Latief does admit that he rang up the Imams and others prominent people of the area intimating them about the alleged desecration of the Holy Quran. This alarm call prompted the Imams and other prominent members asking people to reach the site of incident, admits another local.

Around 300 people gathered at the site of the incident and began raising slogans against the BSF personnel. According to eyewitnesses, Tehsildar was the first to reach at the spot. He was accompanied by BSF troops stationed on the other end of the road leading to Dharam village. A BSF officer who arrived at the scene outrightly denied BSF’s role in the incident.

“He was rude and harsh. Abusive is best how one can describe his behaviour,” added another local Fayaz Ahmed. According to locals, SP (Ramban) Javed Mattoo who was keeping a close watch on the entire incident from his Ramban office rang up the Tehsildar. The concerned Tehsildar, according to eye-witnesses informed SP (Ramban) about the anger brewing among the locals over the alleged desecration of

Quran.

Locals maintain with highest degree of confidence that Tehsildar and SP were of the opinion that the entire unit of 76th battalion of BSF should be asked to leave the premises. This was agreed upon by the locals and they left the place of incident, only to return in the morning after the Sehri. At around 6.00 AM in the morning, the protestors again gathered at the site of incident and began raising slogans against the BSF.

Deputy Commissioner Ramban, Shyam Vinod Meena arrived at the scene with a heavy posse of policemen. He was accompanied by Tehsildar Bashir-ul-Hassan, SP (Ramban) Javed Mattoo and SHO Aijaz Ahmed Wani. The trio tried to pacify the mob by making various offers. However, what aggravated the situation was immature handling of the situation by Deputy Commissioner (DC), Shyam Vinod Meena. According to the video footage available with Kashmir Times, Meena is heard assuring the protestors who had gathered at the site of the incident that appropriate action would be taken against those found involved in the incident within a month's time. This irked the protestors. They had been demanding immediate action against the BSF party which had desecrated the Holy Quran. They wanted Deputy Commissioner to heed to what the Tehsildar and the SP had agreed with them during the night.

However, the DC without taking into account the risk factors involved, according to eyewitnesses, asked the SP and SHO to take people along and get the issue sorted out with the BSF unit posted in Dharam. Protestors were being led by a school lecturer Manzoor Ahmed Shan, known widely across Gool town for being soft-spoken and law abiding. Shan was the brother of NC leader Shamshad Shan.

The protestors reached outside the barbed wire fence of the BSF unit. SP and SHO went inside. According to eye-witnesses, the locals were peacefully agitating outside the camp of 76 BSF. Even the video footage shows the locals standing outside the camp unarmed and waiting for their emissaries i.e. SHO and SP to come out. According to eye-witnesses, an officer of the unit came out and told the protestors to return as the issue is being discussed and would be resolved amicably shortly. This again led to altercation between the two sides, maintain the eyewitnesses. The

altercation took an ugly turn when someone from the crowd pelted stones on the sheds of BSF camp. The officers quickly returned to the camp.

In the meanwhile, Manzoor was seen pacifying the agitators and telling them not to pelt stones on the BSF camp. “He was pleading with us not to pelt stones. As soon as we stopped, BSF opened fire at the crowd killing one of the protestors on spot. This led to intensified stone pelting on the camp,” added another eye-witness. He said that BSF fire was followed by SHO Aijaz Ahmed Wani asking his troops to open fire.

“We saw him shooting Manzoor Shan from point blank range. After Manzoor Sahab was killed, there was heavy fire from the police and BSF. SP would have been killed, had he not gone into hiding. Thereafter, we kept picking up wounded and dead. We reiterate that it was J&K Police which opened indiscriminate fire,” said a 21-year old Fareed.

He too said that SHO Aijaz Ahmed Wani had been searching for an opportunity to take revenge on Manzoor Ahmed Shan. The entire village spoke in unison while talking about SHO Aijaz Ahmed Wani being the main culprit in the entire episode. The dead as well as injured were shifted to District Hospital Ramban.

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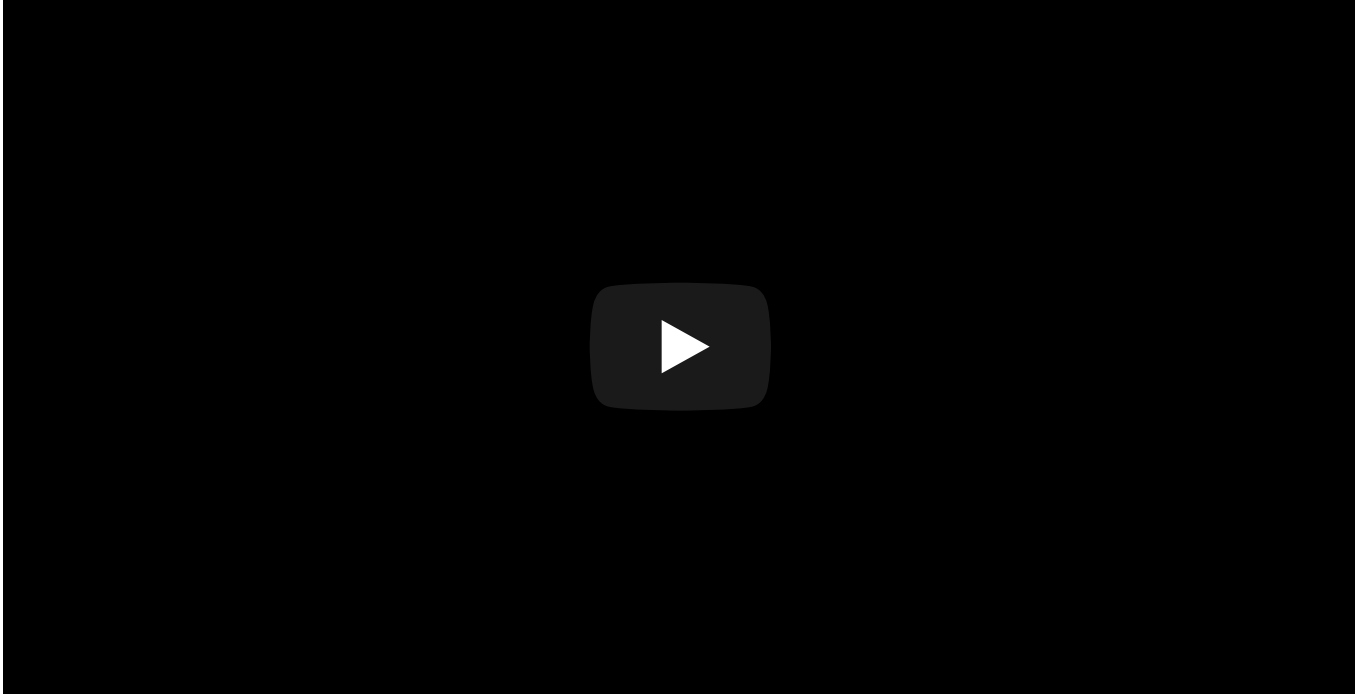

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J&K RELATED WEBSITES

- J&K Govt. Official website (http://jkgad.nic.in/)
- Jammu Kashmir Tourism (http://www.jktourism.org/)
- JKTDC (http://www.jktdc.co.in/)
- Mata Vaishnodevi Shrine Board (http://www.maavaishnodevi.org/)
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UTILITY

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