Anti-Terror Squad

Sriharikota-born researcher and his Mumbai-born professor help improve airport security in the US

JAGDEEP PARSAR
Mumbai, October 1, 2007

It was his voracious appetite for research that made engineer Praveen Paruthur leave home in
Sriharikota for the US in 2002. It was this hunger again that made him stand out among his peers, and his
theesis was picked up by security authorities at Los Angeles airport. The officials, who are seeking
better measures to counter the increased threat posed by terrorists, are now trying it out, according to
Praveen’s professor, Milind Tambe (42).

‘For security, police have to commit to a policy while their adversaries may observe and exploit the same.’
This was the line underlying Praveen’s research at the University of Southern California, Viterbi. Titled
‘Keeping the Adversary Guessing: Agent Security by Policy Randomization’, his program was funded by the
Department of Homeland Security’s Centre for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorism Events (CREATE).

“To interrupt or deter a terrorist plot in the surveillance phase is the safest and most efficient manner to
protect the airport,” said James Bix, director of law enforcement for Los Angeles airport. “This programme
and technology directly addresses thwarting potential terrorists at the earliest stages of planning.”

How it came about

Speaking to Yuva, Prof Tambe, who grew up in Mumbai and has parents living here, said that at the founding
of CREATE, different professors were making presentations when it occurred to him that terrorists manipu-
late the fact that everything has a schedule. “So the idea of randomization came up,” he said.

He posed the problem to Praveen: “We were at that time (in 2004) strug-
gling with some results where randomization had to be addressed to solve a problem,” Prof Tambe said.

“Then it occurred to us that we could just focus on randomization as an important property of plans or
schedules.”

In May 2007, when Praveen’s PhD was published, he presented his papers to police officers.

‘Come home’

Praveen’s father, a scientist with the Indian Space Research Organization, wants him to return
and serve his own country. “I intend to do so,” the 26-
year-old told Yuva on telephone. “But for a few years, I want to work here.”

According to him, the greatest reward for a researcher is when his research is put to practical use.
Praveen wants to “make tools that will assist a cop and provide him with an artificial intelligence”.

But he does see much scope for research in India. “In India, if I am doing a PhD, I am seen as someone
who is getting into academics,” he said. “Here, there are so many companies waiting to hire researchers. It’s so
much of encouragement.”

3 youths held for abducting biz man

RAJ PARLEKAR
Mumbai, October 1, 2007

Police on Saturday arrested three youths for allegedly detaining a 21-year-old businessman.
Police said Pramod Sharma (22), a resident of Goregaon, Balal Desai (26), a resident of the GT
Hospital servant quarters, and Sameer Omar Abdul Sheikh (28), a Santa Cruz (West) resident,
abducted Veeraj Bapar, a resident of Thakur Complex, from his Mangalas Ladies Shop in
Akurli on Friday night.

They allegedly took Mr Bapar to a place in
Santa Cruz and assaulted him. They also allegedly threatened him to return the chain and bracelet of
a girl, with whom he had been frequenting a pub in Juhu.

“They told Bapar that they would be coming on
Saturday to collect the valuables at Akurli,” said Senior Police Inspector M.G. Sakpal of the
Santa Nagar police station. “Bapar then regist-
ered a complaint with the police, who laid a trap and arrested the trio on Saturday.”

The three youths have been remanded in
custody till October 9.

Birthday boy killed in car crash

RAJ PARLEKAR & KISHOR SETH
Mumbai, October 1, 2007

A teenager on his way to cele-
bamate his birthday and a friend lost their lives after his
car hit a lamp post on the Western
Express Highway at about 2.30am on Sunday.
Sufian Khan and friends Zaid Khan (26), Shaild Sheikh (21), and Farzan Merchant (26) were
heading for Hotel Fountain at Mira Road from Jogeshwari to celebrate Sufian’s 26th Birthday.
But, at Balaji Dhamramkota area in Bhandripeth, he lost control, police said.
Sufian and Zaid died on the spot while Shaild and Farzan are being treated for their
injuries at the intensive care unit of Nanavati Hospital. The car was smashed so badly that
Sufian had to use gas cutters to extricate the corpses.
Zaid was to marry on December 10.

Preliminary investigations indicated that Sufian was driving the car, a red
Meraki Swift, at high speed. Police said a
group of four other youngsters was driving alongside in a Tata Indica. “It is possible
that the two groups were racing and Sufian lost control,” said Ravi Thakur, senior
inspector at the Dahisar police station.

Police have ruled out the possibility of drunk driving. “It is a clear case of over-
speeding,” said Inspector Thakur.
Zaid’s household at Mitu Apartments in Oshiwara was in a state of shock. A second-
year commerce student of NM College, Zaid aspired to be a businessman and had a
promising future, said a relation. “The four boys were thick friends,” said an aunt, who
told him not to divulge her name. “It’s all over now. Allah has been unkind to us.”

Two buildings away, the Sheikhs were
hoping for Sufian’s survival. Neighbours
said the web designer was a well-behaved boy. “It’s just bad luck,” said his aunt,
speaking to Yuva on the building’s intercom. “We are praying that he survives.”

Police search turns on wrong suspect. pd