

The Honeymoon Murder: Unraveling the Conspiracy and Legal Proceedings in Shillong

Executive Summary

The tragic case of Raja Raghuvanshi, an Indore businessman murdered during his honeymoon in Meghalaya, has culminated in significant legal developments with the production of his wife, Sonam Raghuvanshi, and four co-accused before the Shillong court on June 11, 2025. Investigations by the Meghalaya Police have meticulously pieced together an alleged conspiracy, revealing Sonam Raghuvanshi as the orchestrator, in connivance with her alleged lover, Raj Kushwaha. The swift and comprehensive "Operation Honeymoon" led to the apprehension of all five individuals involved, demonstrating robust inter-state police coordination and effective use of modern investigative techniques. While the police aim for an expeditious trial and a "watertight" chargesheet, the case has also sparked intense public discourse, including demands for capital punishment from the victim's family and counter-claims of innocence and defamation from the accused's families and Meghalaya state officials. The ongoing legal proceedings will now focus on securing police custody for further interrogation and crime scene reconstruction, marking a critical transition from investigation to prosecution.

1. Introduction: The Honeymoon Tragedy Unfolds

The serene landscapes of Meghalaya became the backdrop for a shocking crime that has gripped national attention: the murder of Raja Raghuvanshi during his honeymoon. This section details the initial events, from the couple's arrival to the grim discovery that launched a complex investigation.

1.1 Background of the Couple and Initial Disappearance

Raja Raghuvanshi, a 29-year-old businessman from Indore, and Sonam Raghuvanshi, 24, were married on May 11, 2025. Just days later, on May 20, they embarked on what was meant to be a joyous honeymoon to Meghalaya.¹ Their initial travel plans, which reportedly included a visit to a temple in Guwahati, were later altered to focus on Meghalaya.³

The couple was last seen on May 23, after checking out of a homestay in Nongriat village, an area approximately 20 kilometers from where Raja's body would later be discovered.¹ A day later, on May 24, their rented scooter was found abandoned near Sohrarim, with the keys still in the ignition, immediately raising alarms and prompting a search operation.¹ The search intensified, and on June 2, Raja Raghuvanshi's semi-decomposed body was tragically found in a deep gorge below the Wei Sawdong

Falls parking lot in Sohra, East Khasi Hills district.¹ The body was identified by a distinctive tattoo on his right hand.⁶ An autopsy subsequently confirmed that Raja had suffered two fatal head injuries, consistent with a sharp weapon.¹ A bloodstained machete, locally known as a 'dao', believed to be the murder weapon, was later recovered and confirmed to have been purchased near Guwahati railway station.⁶

Sonam Raghuvanshi, who had initially been reported missing alongside her husband, later surfaced on June 9 at a roadside dhaba in Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh, where she surrendered to the police.¹

The alleged selection of a remote and rugged location like Wei Sawdong Falls, characterized by its "difficult terrain" with "steep gorges, dense paths, and poor weather conditions," initially posed significant challenges to the investigation, even making drone surveillance "nearly impossible".⁹ This choice suggests a calculated attempt by the perpetrators to choose a crime scene that would hinder body recovery and complicate the investigation, as evidenced by the decomposed state of Raja's body upon discovery.⁷ However, the eventual successful deployment of drone technology by the police⁸ and a crucial tip-off from a local tourist guide⁵ ultimately undermined this strategy. This progression illustrates that while criminals may attempt to exploit environmental challenges for concealment, evolving law enforcement capabilities, including technological advancements and community vigilance, can effectively overcome such obstacles, leading to the rapid unraveling of even seemingly well-planned crimes.

2. Unraveling the Conspiracy: A Betrayal on Honeymoon

The investigation quickly shifted focus from a missing persons case to a meticulously planned murder, revealing a shocking betrayal at its core. This section delves into the alleged roles of the masterminds and the hired individuals.

2.1 The Alleged Masterminds: Sonam Raghuvanshi and Raj Kushwaha

Police investigations have consistently pointed to Raja Raghuvanshi's wife, Sonam, as the primary orchestrator of the killing plot. She allegedly conspired with her boyfriend, Raj Kushwaha, who is 21 years old and worked as an accountant at Sonam's family's furniture sheet business in Indore.¹ Despite claims by Raj's sister that their relationship was strictly professional and that he referred to Sonam as "didi" (elder sister), evidence gathered by the police suggests a deeper, intimate connection.¹⁴

Crucial evidence supporting the premeditation of the murder emerged from Sonam's phone. Retrieved chats revealed her emotional detachment from Raja even before

their wedding and an explicit desire to "eliminate him".⁹ The alleged plan was to stage the murder as a robbery gone wrong. To support this fabricated narrative, Sonam reportedly left her home with jewelry and instructed Raja to carry expensive jewelry during their trip.²

A significant aspect of the conspiracy was Raj Kushwaha's decision not to travel to Meghalaya for the murder. Instead, he remained in Indore, maintaining his daily routine to avoid suspicion.¹ His role allegedly included providing financial support to the hired killers, giving each of them between ₹40,000 and ₹50,000 for their journey.¹⁶

2.2 The Hired Hands: Akash Rajput, Vishal Singh Chauhan, and Anand Kurmi

Raj Kushwaha allegedly hired three men—Vishal Singh Chauhan (22, also referred to as Vicky Thakur in some reports), Akash Rajput (19), and Anand Kurmi (23)—to carry out the murder.¹ These individuals were reportedly friends of Raj Kushwaha and had known each other prior to the incident.² According to police, Vishal and Anand are students, Akash is unemployed, and none had a prior criminal record.¹²

The trio traveled from Indore to Meghalaya via Guwahati and Shillong using a multi-train route.⁸ Police investigations revealed that Sonam maintained continuous phone contact with Raj Kushwaha on the day of the murder, and Raj, in turn, coordinated with the three contract killers.¹⁵ Accounts from the alleged killers suggest that they initially hesitated to commit the act, but Sonam insisted, reportedly offering to raise the payment from an initial ₹4 lakh to ₹20 lakh.¹⁰ The alleged plan involved Sonam feigning tiredness, strategically positioning the killers behind Raja, and then instructing them to carry out the murder at a deserted spot.¹⁴ All four accused, including Sonam and the three hired men, have reportedly confessed to the killing, with Vishal Singh Chauhan allegedly striking the first blow.¹³ Sonam was reportedly present at the scene, witnessed her husband's death, and actively helped push his body into the gorge.¹⁰

Sonam's pre-wedding communications expressing a desire to "eliminate" Raja⁹ and her alleged persistence in ensuring the murder, even when the hired individuals showed reluctance¹⁴, indicate a deep-seated, calculated intent. The claim, made by Raja's father, that Sonam sought to murder him to remove a 'Mangal Dosh' from her horoscope to facilitate marriage with Raj⁶—though dismissed by astrologers—is noteworthy. This suggests a possible attempt to rationalize a heinous act through superstition, providing a perceived moral or cosmic justification for her actions. Furthermore, her active and direct participation in the murder itself and the subsequent disposal of the body¹⁰ demonstrates a profound level of detachment and

commitment to the crime, extending far beyond mere planning. This deeper examination highlights the complex interplay of motive, rationalization, and psychological states that can drive individuals to commit such extreme acts of betrayal, often masked by superficial or even superstitious justifications.

Table 1: Key Accused and Their Status

Name	Alleged Role	Age	Arrest Location	Current Custody Status (as of June 11, 2025)	Notes
Sonam Raghuvanshi	Prime Orchestrator, Wife of Victim	24	Ghazipur, UP	Produced in Shillong court, police custody sought	Surrendered; alleged pre-wedding intent to "eliminate" husband; helped dispose of body ¹
Raj Kushwaha	Alleged Lover, Co-conspirator	21	Indore, MP	Produced in Shillong court, police custody sought	Worked at Sonam's family business; funded killers; did not travel to Meghalaya ¹
Akash Rajput	Hired Killer	19	Lalitpur, UP	Produced in Shillong court, police custody sought	Unemployed; reportedly confessed ¹
Vishal Singh Chauhan	Hired Killer	22	Indore, MP	Produced in Shillong court, police custody	Student; also known as Vicky Thakur; reportedly

				sought	struck first blow ¹
Anand Kurmi	Hired Killer	23	Bina, MP	Produced in Shillong court, police custody sought (transit custody until June 16)	Student; reportedly confessed ¹

3. The Investigation: "Operation Honeymoon" and Breakthroughs

The rapid progress in solving the Raja Raghuvanshi murder case is a testament to the diligent and strategic efforts of the Meghalaya Police. Their investigative approach, codenamed "Operation Honeymoon," quickly yielded significant breakthroughs.

3.1 Meghalaya Police's Proactive Approach

The Meghalaya Police demonstrated a swift and proactive response by establishing a Special Investigation Team (SIT) and codenaming the complex inquiry "Operation Honeymoon".¹ Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma and Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong publicly lauded the police for their "exceptional work" and the "solid evidence" gathered within a remarkably short period of seven days, which led to a major breakthrough in the case.¹ The Chief Minister explicitly stated that there was "no need for any other agency to probe the case," directly addressing and countering the calls for a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry from various quarters, including the family of the deceased and the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.⁸

3.2 Key Evidence and Investigative Techniques

The success of "Operation Honeymoon" was built upon a multi-faceted investigative strategy, combining traditional policing with advanced technological applications.

A crucial turning point in the investigation came from Albert Pde, a local tourist guide. He provided a vital clue by observing Raja, Sonam, and three other men together on May 23, the day the couple went missing.⁵ Pde later successfully identified one of the suspects from photographs provided by the police, underscoring the importance of local community engagement in criminal investigations.¹¹

The SIT's initial suspicions about Sonam were heightened after they uncovered her fabrication regarding fasting for Raja's health; hotel records confirmed she had

eaten.³ Subsequent technical surveillance on her communications revealed her continuous contact with Raj Kushwaha.³ Furthermore, incriminating chats retrieved from Sonam's phone were instrumental in establishing the depth and premeditation of the conspiracy.⁹

Surveillance camera footage also played a critical role, placing Sonam with the alleged killers approximately 10 kilometers from where Raja's body was eventually recovered.⁹ This visual evidence was crucial for tracing the movements of the accused and significantly strengthening the overall investigation.¹⁷

Physical evidence collected from the crime scene or its vicinity included a bloodstained machete (dao), believed to be the murder weapon, along with a raincoat, a woman's white shirt, a strip of medicine, a part of a mobile LCD screen, and a smartwatch.⁶ The police plan to send the recovered clothes to a forensic science laboratory for further analysis of bloodstains.¹

The successful apprehension of the accused across different states highlighted effective inter-state police cooperation. Meghalaya Police collaborated seamlessly with their counterparts in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.¹ Evidence was systematically collected from the residences and other frequented locations of the accused in Indore and Ghazipur.¹

The rapid resolution of the "Honeymoon Murder" case, particularly the swift identification and apprehension of all key accused, was not due to a singular piece of evidence or investigative method. Instead, it emerged from a synergistic combination of traditional policing techniques—such as leveraging a crucial tip from a local tourist guide and meticulous physical evidence collection—and advanced technological applications, including drone surveillance in challenging terrain, sophisticated technical surveillance of communications, and analysis of CCTV footage. Moreover, the seamless inter-state coordination among police forces was vital in tracking and apprehending individuals across different jurisdictions. This comprehensive and integrated approach allowed the Meghalaya Police to systematically piece together a complex narrative from diverse and often fragmented sources, effectively overcoming challenges like the difficult terrain and the accused's deliberate attempts to destroy evidence, such as discarding mobile phones and SIM cards. This successful methodology underscores that in contemporary criminal investigations, especially those involving complex conspiracies spanning multiple states, a multi-faceted and adaptable strategy is paramount. The speed of the breakthrough, achieved within seven days of the body's discovery⁵, further highlights the efficiency and efficacy of this integrated investigative model. This success reinforced the Meghalaya Chief

Minister's confidence in the state police and his subsequent rejection of demands for external probes, demonstrating how a well-executed investigation can bolster public trust and political standing.

3.3 Sonam's Post-Murder Movements and Apprehension

Following the murder on May 23, Sonam reportedly fled Shillong on May 25, traveling to Indore via Siliguri by train.⁹ In Indore, she allegedly reunited with Raj Kushwaha and stayed in a rented flat between May 25 and 27.¹ Raj then purportedly arranged a cab for her to travel to a hideout in Uttar Pradesh.¹⁴ Sonam was ultimately located at a roadside dhaba in Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh, on June 9.² She had approached the dhaba owner for assistance, fabricating a story that her husband was killed while attempting to protect her from a robbery.⁴ She subsequently surrendered to the Uttar Pradesh Police around 1 AM on Monday, June 10.¹ Police sources indicated that there might have been a plan for Sonam to escape to Nepal via the Gorakhpur route.⁸

4. Legal Proceedings: Shillong Court on June 11, 2025

The focus of the "Honeymoon Murder" case shifted to the legal arena on June 11, 2025, as all accused were presented before the Shillong court. This marked a crucial step in the judicial process, moving from investigation to formal prosecution.

4.1 Production of Accused and Remand Requests

On June 11, 2025, Sonam Raghuvanshi, identified as the prime accused, along with the four co-accused—Raj Kushwaha, Akash Rajput, Vishal Singh Chauhan, and Anand Kurmi—were produced before a local court in Shillong.¹ Sonam arrived in Shillong late on Tuesday night (June 10), having been transported by Meghalaya Police from Guwahati.¹⁷ The other four accused were also brought to Shillong; some had already been granted a 7-day transit remand on Monday.¹ Specifically, accused Anand Kurmi was sent to transit custody until June 16, while three other accused had received a 7-day transit remand on Monday.¹ The Meghalaya Police, through Superintendent of Police Vivek Syiem, confirmed their intention to seek police custody for all five accused. This critical step is necessary to facilitate further interrogation and comprehensive evidence gathering as part of the ongoing investigation.¹

4.2 Next Steps in Investigation: Crime Scene Reconstruction and Evidence Corroboration

A critical next phase in the investigation involves the Special Investigation Team (SIT) planning to take all five accused to the crime scene at Wei Sawdong Falls near Sohra. The purpose of this visit is to reconstruct the sequence of events, which is vital for

corroborating the confessions already obtained and gaining a clearer understanding of how the crime was executed.¹³ The police also intend to conduct confrontations between Sonam, Raj Kushwaha, and the alleged killers, presenting them with the evidence collected to further solidify the case.¹⁴ Authorities are actively investigating the financial aspect of the crime, particularly the exact amount the three hired men were paid for executing the murder.¹⁷ While some sources suggest Sonam offered up to ₹20 lakh ¹⁰, the precise confirmed amount remains under investigation.⁹ The SIT has expressed confidence in the substantial progress and strong evidence collected thus far, aiming to submit a robust and "watertight" chargesheet swiftly to ensure an expeditious trial.¹⁷

The consistent emphasis on "police custody" and the need for "further investigation" ¹ following the June 11 court appearance highlights the critical nature of this phase in the criminal justice process. This is not merely a formality of formalizing arrests; it represents a legally sanctioned period for intensive interrogation, detailed crime scene reconstruction, and the corroboration of various pieces of evidence. The explicit plan to transport all accused to the murder site ¹³ and to confront them with the collected evidence ¹⁴ indicates a deliberate and strategic approach by the police to solidify their case by verifying details from multiple sources, including initial confessions, physical evidence, and digital traces. In complex criminal conspiracy cases, the initial arrests are merely the preliminary step. Police remand is indispensable as it provides investigators with the necessary legal time and authority to delve deeper into the intricacies of the crime. It allows for the extraction of more granular details, cross-verification of information provided by different accused, and the systematic collection of corroborating evidence. This phase is crucial for transforming preliminary findings and statements into legally admissible proof, ensuring that the eventual chargesheet is comprehensive, robust, and capable of withstanding rigorous legal scrutiny during the trial. The stated objective of building a "watertight case" ¹⁷ explicitly underscores the strategic significance of this post-production remand period in securing a successful prosecution.

Table 2: Timeline of Major Events

Date	Event Description	Significance
May 11, 2025	Raja Raghuvanshi and Sonam Raghuvanshi get married in Indore.	Beginning of the couple's journey, preceding the alleged conspiracy. ¹

May 20, 2025	Raja and Sonam depart for their honeymoon in Meghalaya.	Start of the ill-fated trip. ¹
May 23, 2025	Couple reported missing after checking out of homestay in Nongriat.	Day of alleged murder; initial disappearance. ¹
May 24, 2025	Their rented scooter found abandoned near Sohrarim.	First major clue indicating trouble. ¹
June 2, 2025	Raja Raghuvanshi's body found in a gorge below Wei Sawdong Falls.	Confirmation of murder; intensified search for Sonam. ¹
June 7, 2025	Meghalaya Police launch "Operation Honeymoon" to track Sonam and other accused.	Formalization of intensive, targeted investigation. ⁹
June 9, 2025	Sonam Raghuvanshi surrenders to Uttar Pradesh Police in Ghazipur.	Key breakthrough in apprehending the prime accused. ¹
June 10, 2025	Four co-accused (Raj Kushwaha, Akash Rajput, Vishal Singh Chauhan, Anand Kurmi) arrested across MP/UP; transit remands granted.	Apprehension of all alleged conspirators and hired killers. ¹
June 10, 2025	Meghalaya CM Conrad Sangma commends police, rejects CBI probe.	Government's public confidence in state police's capabilities. ¹
June 11, 2025	All five accused produced in Shillong court; police seek custody.	Critical legal milestone; transition to formal prosecution phase. ¹

5. Reactions and Public Discourse

The "Honeymoon Murder" case has not only unfolded as a criminal investigation but has also ignited significant public and political reactions, shaping narratives and

influencing perceptions across states.

5.1 Families' Reactions and Demands

Raja Raghuvanshi's father, Ashok Raghuvanshi, expressed profound grief and demanded the "death penalty for all culprits" to serve as a deterrent and ensure justice for his son's agony.⁶ Notably, Raja's elder brother, Vipin Raghuvanshi, publicly apologized for earlier statements accusing the Meghalaya Police of negligence, acknowledging that they "did not know that Meghalaya Police were conducting a secret operation" to apprehend the killers and expressing gratitude to the Madhya Pradesh government for their support.⁷

In stark contrast, Sonam Raghuvanshi's father, Devi Singh Raghuvanshi, adamantly insisted on his daughter's "100 per cent innocent" status, claiming she was "abducted and falsely implicated" and that the Meghalaya Police were "misleading the media".¹² He vociferously demanded a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry into the murder, a call echoed by Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, who wrote to the Union Home Minister requesting a central investigation.⁸ Similarly, Raj Kushwaha's mother, Chunni Devi, maintained her son's innocence, asserting he was "framed" and recounting how he cried inconsolably after Raja's funeral.¹² His sister, Suhani, further supported this, stating that Raj's relationship with Sonam was strictly professional, referring to her as "didi".¹⁴

5.2 Government Response and Image Management

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma strongly condemned what he described as an "unfair narrative" and the "branding" of Meghalaya and the entire Northeast region in the wake of the murder, arguing that the state was being "vilified".⁴ He pointed out that "none of the accused are from Meghalaya" as a key defense against the negative portrayal.⁴ Meghalaya Minister Alexander Laloo Hek went further, demanding that defamation cases be filed against individuals and entities who "tarnished" the state's image on social media and national media, insisting they should issue an apology.¹ Both the Chief Minister and Tourism Minister Paul Lyngdoh actively worked to reassure the public and the tourism industry about the state's safety for tourists, despite initial concerns and reports of "partial cancellations" by travel agencies.²³ They highlighted the police's swift and effective action in solving the case as a means to "restore the image of the northeast".⁹ The state government publicly pledged to ensure an "expeditious trial" and "swift justice" for Raja Raghuvanshi, demonstrating their commitment to the rule of law.¹

The "Honeymoon Murder" case rapidly transcended its initial scope as a local criminal

investigation, evolving into an inter-state "blame game" ⁸ and a significant political issue concerning Meghalaya's public image. The persistent demands for a CBI probe from Madhya Pradesh officials and Sonam's father ⁸, juxtaposed against the Meghalaya Chief Minister's staunch defense of his state's police force and explicit threats of defamation lawsuits ⁴, vividly illustrate how high-profile criminal cases can transform into battlegrounds for political and regional pride. The deliberate emphasis by Meghalaya officials that "none of the accused are from Meghalaya" ⁴ serves as a clear strategic attempt to externalize blame and protect the state's reputation, particularly its vital tourism sector.²³ This phenomenon reveals that criminal justice is not a purely legal process but is deeply intertwined with public perception and political maneuvering. Governments are acutely sensitive to how their states are portrayed, especially when their economic sectors, like tourism, are at stake. The imperative to protect a state's image can significantly influence official statements and actions, potentially leading to a defensive stance against external criticism or demands for central governmental intervention. This dynamic highlights the complex interplay where the factual investigation of a crime becomes enmeshed with public relations and political strategies, ultimately shaping the narrative and public discourse surrounding the case.

5.3 Public Reaction

A palpable display of public anger and emotional response to the crime was observed when a bystander attempted to assault one of the accused at Indore airport as police escorted them, underscoring the strong societal reaction to the brutality of the case.¹

6. Conclusion: Current Status and Outlook

The "Honeymoon Murder" case, a tragic narrative of betrayal and premeditated violence, has reached a critical juncture with all alleged perpetrators now in custody and facing legal proceedings.

6.1 Summary of Current Status

As of June 11, 2025, all five key accused—Sonam Raghuvanshi, Raj Kushwaha, Akash Rajput, Vishal Singh Chauhan, and Anand Kurmi—have been successfully apprehended and produced before the Shillong court. The Meghalaya Police's "Operation Honeymoon" has demonstrated remarkable efficiency, achieving significant breakthroughs and gathering substantial evidence, including digital footprints, crucial witness testimony from a tourist guide, and various pieces of physical evidence. Reports indicate that some of the accused have already confessed to their involvement. The investigation has strongly established a narrative of a premeditated murder, meticulously orchestrated by Sonam Raghuvanshi and Raj

Kushwaha, with an alleged intent to stage the crime as a robbery gone wrong.

6.2 Anticipated Next Steps

The immediate and critical next step in the legal process is for the Meghalaya Police to secure police custody for all accused. This remand period will be utilized for further intensive interrogation, detailed crime scene reconstruction at Wei Sawdong Falls, and thorough corroboration of all collected evidence.¹⁴ The Special Investigation Team (SIT) is committed to building a "watertight" chargesheet and aims to submit it swiftly, signaling their intent for an expeditious trial to ensure rapid justice.¹⁷ The investigation into the precise monetary aspect of the contract killing, including the exact amount paid to the hired individuals, remains an active area of inquiry.⁹ It is anticipated that the defense teams for the accused will mount a vigorous challenge to the police's narrative, likely reiterating claims of innocence and potentially continuing to advocate for a central investigation.

While the Meghalaya Police have expressed confidence in their gathered evidence and their aim for a "watertight chargesheet" and an "expeditious trial" ¹, the persistent counter-narratives from the accused's families—including claims of framing and renewed demands for a CBI probe ¹²—signal a crucial transition in the case. The focus is now shifting from the investigative phase, which primarily involves evidence discovery and apprehension, to the more adversarial prosecutorial phase. This new phase presents distinct challenges: the police and prosecution must not only present their evidence convincingly in court but also effectively counter the defense's arguments, manage public and media scrutiny, and navigate the complexities of judicial proceedings, including potential appeals. A successful investigation, while foundational, does not automatically guarantee a successful prosecution. The judicial process is inherently designed to rigorously test the presented evidence and arguments from both sides. The conflicting claims from the accused's families indicate that the defense will likely challenge the validity of confessions, the chain of custody of evidence, and the overall narrative presented by the prosecution. This underscores that the outlook for the case involves significant legal hurdles that demand robust evidence presentation, skilled cross-examination, and meticulous adherence to legal procedures to ensure that justice is not only served but also seen to be served, despite the emotional and political complexities surrounding the case.

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