

Doubts raised over accusation aunt blinded 6-year-old boy

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Police have identified a family member as the key suspect in a shocking case in which the eyes of a 6-year-old boy were gouged out.

However, he boy's parents and neighbors are skeptical of the accusation.

Zhang Huiying, 41, the boy's aunt, was identified by police as the suspect after DNA testing showed the victim's blood was found on her clothes, police in the city of Linfen said late on Tuesday.

The boy, Guo Bin, was lured by an unknown woman into a field near his home in Fenxi county, Linfen, on the evening of Aug 24, and was found later with both eyes missing.

The case shocked the nation for its cruelty, and the boy's question after he was taken to hospital, "Why does the sky remain dark?" touched the hearts of many people.

Police later found the boy's eyes and said they had excluded the possibility of organ trafficking, and put up a reward of 100,000 yuan (\$16,300) for clues leading to the capture of the suspect.

Zhang, who worked at a chicken farm, is reported to have committed suicide by jumping into a well in her yard on Friday.

However, the police identification of Zhang as the suspect, including her neighbors and the boy's father, and they question both the aunt's motive and the boy's failure to identify her as the attacker.

Guo Zhiping, the boy's

father, said the police never told him the result of the investigation, and he only found out about it from media reports.

"It came as a shock. I still don't believe it," he said on Wednesday.

He also denied media reports that his family conflicted with his brother's family over providing support to their paralyzed father, saying the two families maintained "OK" relations.

He also insisted the boy would have identified his aunt if she had committed the crime.

As of Wednesday, the police in Linfen were yet to release more details about the case, including Zhang's possible motive.

A 'good wife'

The result of the police investigation also shocked neighbors who knew Zhang well and recalled her as kind and quiet.

Liu Lanzhi, a 58-year-old neighbor, said Zhang was a "very good wife" and very timid.

"I will never believe this was done by her. I don't believe it, 100 percent," she said.

Liu said she never heard of any conflict between the two families and said the aunt even tried a superstitious ritual to bring back the boy's soul after the attack. Some locals believe a person's soul is lost when they are scared by such extreme circumstances.

However, the police investigation and the arrival of reporters terrified her, which Liu said reflected her timid nature.

"She could be scared by just

the sound of a cup dropping," she said.

The two families had a very good relationship with each other, according to a neighbor, who lived less than 100 meters away from Zhang Huiying's home, and who is also surnamed Zhang but no relation to her.

"They often took the vegetables they grew to the boy's family. If they harbored any dislike for each other, I don't think that would happen," the 38-year-old man said.

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Zhang Huiying was bitten by a snake before she was married and the injury traumatized her, he said. "She was very timid. The sound of thunder could keep her awake all night," the neighbor said.

She even fainted six years ago when hearing that one of Guo Bin's elder sisters died after falling into a well.

"Even if she had the intention, was she physically capable of committing the brutal act? I highly doubt that," he said.

"She was easygoing and never argued with her husband or others. She was definitely a good wife," said Guo Liangbao, a 63-year-old neighbor.

Life in the dark

"This is Guangtougang. This is a big bear. This is Ultraman..." muttered Guo Bin, who is receiving treatment at a hospital in Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi, as he tried to identify toys donated to him by volunteers on Tuesday night. He guessed correctly each time.

While playing with his new toys, he also occasionally listened to stories played on a tape recorder or on toys with

a broadcast function.

This is how the 6-year-old boy occupies himself 10 days after the vicious attack, resting in hospital on an intravenous drip and having eye drops applied every two hours.

Piled up in the corner of the ward are flowers, fruit, snacks and other gifts.

Guo Bin, however, does not know what is happening outside his hospital ward, apart from a few sounds, such as knocks on his door.

He has had visitors from all around Shanxi and even from Hebei, Shandong, Hubei and other provinces far from Taiyuan.

However, he cannot bear any long separation from his mother.

"Mum! Mum!" he calls if she leaves his side for long.

So many people have visited that the hospital has arranged security guards on duty 24 hours a day to prevent too many people from entering and to ensure a quiet environment for the patient.

Some visitors simply come, hand over what they call a "little something" and leave without saying who they are.

On a chair by the door is a notebook Guo Bin's parents are using to keep a record of the names of donors and the amount of their donations.

Guo Zhiping, the father, said the family has received 1 million yuan in donations since the attack became public.

Guo Bin has still not been told that he has permanently lost his eyesight.

"When can I go to school?" he asked, and occasionally, "Why can't I see now?"

His uncle, Wang Yuji, some-

times joked with the boy, saying, "Once you can see, you will see your mother. And your mother will probably blame you and spank you."

He added that the family is more concerned about the psychological scars the child may suffer than the physical ones.

Late on Wednesday, doctors told China News Service that Guo Bin has recovered well and is already fit enough to be discharged from the hospital. Implanting artificial eyes could be done as early as a month from now, they said.

The family decided to accept surgery to implant artificial eyes after they were visited by a team of three Hong Kong experts on Sunday, who said there is a possibility Guo Bin could regain some sense of light by implanting electronic ocular prostheses at a hospital in Hong Kong, his mother, Wang Wenli, said.

However, they have yet to decide where to have the surgery.

"He is still quite young. If he was born without eyesight, that might not be too cruel for him. But he could see before and now, suddenly, he can't see. That could be unbearable for him, or even for us adults," said Wang. "We will do anything and go anywhere so long as he can gain a little sense of light in his life."

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STORMY GATHERING

PHOTO BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

Around 4,000 freshmen brave the rain to take part in the opening ceremony at the University of International Business and Economics, in Beijing, on Wednesday.

expospecial

Russian trade boost from China-Northeast Asia Expo

By **LI FUSHENG**
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As Sino-Russian economic relations continue to grow, a large expo in Changchun will attract more participants from neighboring Russia, said the event's organizing committee.

"Among others, Russia's Vologda state government, the trade representative office in China, the Primorsky Krai industry and commerce association, and the Ural industry and commerce association will send representatives to the ninth China-Northeast Asia Expo," said the expo's secretariat.

"Also, such enterprises as Penza Development Group

and the St Petersburg International Exhibition Center will come and showcase their products, including candies, dairy products, and mineral water," it added.

The expo will kick off on Sept 6 in Changchun, capital of Jilin province in Northeast China, which is the permanent home to the international event. It is scheduled to run through Sept 11.

Founded in 2005, the annual expo is organized by the Ministry of Commerce, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Jilin provincial government.

It is the only expo in the world that links all Northeast Asian countries — China, the

Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia and Russia.

Sergei Tsyplakov, a senior Russian trade delegate in China, said the event serves as an important bridge in Sino-Russian trade.

"Russia attaches great importance to the event and regional delegations have also shown strong interest. We believe that the expo will play an important role in regional economic integration and boost bilateral and multilateral cooperation."

He made the comment during the Sixth High-Level Forum on Northeast Asia Economic and Trade Cooperation, part of last year's expo.

As cooperation deepens among countries in Northeast Asia, China and Russia have been making full use of the expo to strengthen exchanges and economic ties, said local officials.

A recent example is the Hunchun-Makharino railway port that reopened in early August after a nine-year closure.

Chen Weigen, deputy governor of Jilin, noted at the ceremony to celebrate resumption of service that the port greatly reduces the time and cost of goods transported between the two countries and also stimulates two-way investment.

Russian Deputy Transport Minister Alexey Tsydenov said at the ceremony that the resumption will help promote economic development of the Russian Far East and push forward already extensive economic and trade cooperation between Russia and Northeast China, especially Jilin.

It is the only international rail line to Russia from Jilin and one of three from China. It initially started operation in 2002.



The expo has established a reputation as an important platform for boosting trade and investment in the Northeast Asia region.



Russians arrive at the Hunchun port of entry.



A traveler passes through immigration.



A train with a full load of coal from Russia stops at a station in Jilin province.