

Police find no evidence Bourke St killer was mentally ill, links to notorious jihadist revealed



Khaled Sharrouf. Picture: Facebook

Mark Schliebs, Reporter, Richard Ferguson, Reporter, 4 minutes ago November 12, 2018

Scott Morrison says the Bourke Street terrorist's past substance abuse and alleged mental health issues are an "excuse" and that he would continue to call out extremist Islam. Victoria Police said this morning it had been unable to find any evidence yet that Hassan Kalif Shire Ali suffered from mental health issues before he stabbed three people in Melbourne on Friday.

The Prime Minister said this morning that extremist Islam is "the elephant in the room" and that Shire Ali's reported marital struggles and substance abuse did not deter from the fact he was radicalised. "I think that's an excuse. This bloke, radicalised in Australia with extreme Islam, took a knife and cut down a fellow Australian on Bourke Street," he told the Ten Network's Studio 10 this morning. "I'm not going to make excuses ... he was a terrorist. He was a radicalised extremist terrorist."

The Prime Minister has come under pressure for saying over the weekend that extremist Islam was "the greatest threat of religious extremism in the country". Mr Morrison said this morning he consulted with a Muslim community leader before he made those comments, and that commentators accusing him of "dog whistling" are making excuses for terror. "That is the same lame, old, tired excuse for not dealing with this problem as has always

been served up,” he said. “I don’t believe that’s where the majority of decent, hard-working, respectable Australian Muslims are at. They want their communities to be safer.”

Victoria Police’s deputy commissioner Shane Patton said no evidence had been found that Shire Ali was suffering from mental health issues. Reports emerged on weekend that Shire Ali had said he was being “chased by people with spears” before he drove an on-fire vehicle into Melbourne’s Bourke Street and stabbed three people.

“We certainly haven’t been made aware of any mental health issues with this person from our enquiries to date,” Mr Patton told ABC radio. “Any member of the community who has any suspicion, albeit small pieces of information, we’d urge them to ring up and provide that information.” Shire Ali was shot and killed by a rookie police officer on Friday. Deputy Commissioner Patton defended Victoria Police’s shoot-to-kill policy this morning, despite some commentators saying it impedes the chance to gather more information on terrorists.

“You’ve got to eliminate the terrorist threat. It’s about stopping that attack,” he said. “We continue to gain evidence and intelligence when go through their houses and we interview other family members ... we’ve got it right there.”

Bourke St killer’s jihadist ties

The Australian can today reveal Shire Ali had communicated online with Australia’s most notorious jihadist. As serious questions are raised about whether Hassan Khalif Shire Ali was properly monitored by security agencies, in 2014 he became an online friend of Khaled Sharrouf, who by then was a convicted terrorist on the road to international notoriety for his head-severing barbarism.

Shire Ali described himself online as a wannabe Islamic State terrorist and expressed support for ISIS, and his desire to fight in the Middle East.

Using the name Hassan Ali Shire, the Melbourne terrorist described himself on Facebook as a “Mujahid in sha Allah (God willing) at Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham”, even before the terrorist group declared its so-called caliphate. The profile, along with his photo, appeared on a copy of Sharrouf’s friends list that was archived in June 2014.

The Australian has established that the social media account was that of Shire Ali, 30, who killed one man and wounded two others in the terrorist attack in the heart of Melbourne on Friday. Sharrouf attracted international condemnation when he posted a photo of his young son holding a severed head in July 2014. The revelations come as Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton yesterday pleaded with the Islamic community to do in would-be jihadists to help the national security effort.

He said the government and security agencies would review the way Shire Ali had been monitored after it emerged he had been on the terror watch list. Shire Ali was fatally shot on Friday by police. At the time of the Facebook connection, Sharrouf was best known for leaving Australia using his brother's passport following his release from jail, where he served five years for his role in Sydney's "Operation Pendennis", a terror plot that was uncovered in 2005 and was, at the time, the largest anti-terror operation in Australia's history.

It is understood the Facebook post will not surprise counter-terrorism police, who were aware of Shire Ali's radicalisation but were not monitoring him when he struck on Friday, filling his utility with gas canisters and setting it on fire in a bid to create a car-bomb. This was because he had disappeared from the counter-terrorism radar because of adopting a starkly lower profile.

Mr Dutton said there were more than 400 radicalised people being watched in Australia and stressed that not every threat could be dealt with. "Police did not have intelligence in relation to this person that he was about to commit an act," he said.

Shire Ali's social media account was among hundreds expressing support for Islamic State after the group took control of the Iraqi city of Mosul in early June 2014, and what little can be seen of it offers no evidence of any intention to take violent action in Australia.

It's unclear exactly when the account was created, but it was active on June 16, 2014, when he was among the first 27 people to add Sharrouf as a Facebook "friend". At least 10 of Sharrouf's Facebook friends at the time had profile photos that included the Islamic State flag or its logo, but the photo chosen by "Hassan Ali Shire" shows him wearing a broad smile, as a blue hoodie frames his face.

Sharrouf had created his own Facebook account that same day — weeks before he went on to spark global outrage for uploading the photo of his young son. Sharrouf was reportedly killed last year.

It is also unknown how the pair had come to be online friends.

Sharrouf later used the same account to upload photos suggesting he had entered Iraq, which was the first evidence he was engaged in on-the-ground combat. His account was shut down three days after it was created, and there appears to have been little public interaction between him and Shire Ali during that time.

The contact between Shire Ali and Sharrouf came a year before the Melbourne man had his passport cancelled over concerns he planned to travel to Syria.

With John Ferguson