

Cops in the soup over Maoist arrest

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KOLKATA: Serious doubts have arisen about the authenticity of the police claims that they narrowly missed Maoist leader Kishanji on Tuesday, seized his laptop, and arrested three fresh recruits from an arms training camp. Kanika Adak and Shefali Bera, the two girls paraded as Maoist cadres' on Wednesday, may be the same persons who had taken police to court last month over the disappearance of two villagers.

The missing men Raju Adak (30), said to be Kanika's husband, and Joydeb (36), apparently Shefali's father had been picked up by police on December 6, 2009, in Lalgarh, say locals. When asked if the two female cadres' were the same Kanika and Shefali who had filed the case regarding the missing villagers, no police officer, including SP Manoj Verma, would comment. They were not even ready to provide their addresses.

Shefali, a teenager, is a Class XI student of Gurgruriapal High School and Kanika is 23 years old. On Wednesday, West Midnapore police claimed to have arrested them and a youth with a cache of arms, ammunition and IED training manuals. Officers tomtommed this as a major achievement and said the arrested Maoists' would be produced in court (kotwali case number 17, dated Jan 20, 2010). On Thursday, however, the trio was surprisingly freed after merely recording a statement before a magistrate. If they were indeed taking arms training, why did police let them go?

Police are facing uncomfortable questions on Wednesday's raid' and arrest of Maoist cadres' near Pirakata. When asked why the arrested girls Kanika Adak and Shefali Bera were released on Thursday, West Midnapore SP Manoj Verma said: "They had told us that they were taken to the arms training camp forcibly by Maoists and they agreed to depose in court".

And what of Raju and Joydeb? Police claim they were never formally arrested. Villagers, however, say there is no trace of the duo after they were picked up by police. "Till December 10, none of them was produced in court. When family members failed to trace them in police custody, a petition was filed against the police at Jhargram subdivisional court on December 11," said the girls' lawyer Koushik Sinha.

On December 15, based on a direction from the court, Jhargram subdivisional officer P Ulganathan asked the inspector in-charge of Lalgarh police station to submit a report. "In the report, police said they had not arrested either Bera or Adak," Sinha said.

PCPA spokesperson Asit Mahato alleges that police picked up Kanika and Shefali in a bid to hush up the case. "They are related and had gone to Kanika's paternal house in Midnapore. On their way back, they were intercepted and branded as Maoists," he said. "When PCPA had

launched a movement demanding to know the whereabouts of Raju and Joydeb, police went to their houses several times and pressured the families to withdraw the case. But the girls started preparing to move higher courts. Police sensed trouble and picked them up to suppress the case."

Even in the face of such serious allegations, police have strangely remained silent, which has strengthened the villagers' doubts. If Kanika and Shefali are Maoists, then why would they move court, thereby disclosing their whereabouts to police? And if the two had been taking training from Kishanji, then why did police release them?

Police officers refused to answer these questions. Chief secretary Asok Mohan Chakrabarti would not confirm whether the laptop seized' on Wednesday was that of Kishanji. "Police have recovered a laptop from West Midnapore. But I do not have any details on it," Chakrabarti said at Writers' Buildings on Thursday.

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