

Gun-runners' boost to insurgency

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It is rather unfortunate for the Assam police that Bimal Gogoi, an Assamese extremist belonging to the Seven United Liberation Army (SULA), should have been killed in Imphal three weeks ago along with Bedamani, a bomb expert of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

However eventually B. N. Choudhury and his daughter were arrested on charge of making bombs for the Assamese extremists. A former area organiser of the Special Security Bureau (SSB), Choudhury was well versed in bomb-making.

As dead men tell no tale the Assam police may never learn of his role in a series of bomb blasts that rocked the State for two years when the anti-foreigners movement was just petering out.

The SSB was formed in the north-eastern region after the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict. Its aim was to train volunteers in guerilla warfare to hold back any Chinese attack till the regular army arrived. Bomb-making — to delay enemy advance by damaging bridges and roads — was part of the training.

But from the fact that he was shot dead by unknown gunmen along with a top PLA leader this much is certain: that Manipur and Assam insurgents were jointly carrying out underground operations in various parts of Assam. It is significant that while Bedamani was in Assam Manipur insurgents did not explode even a single bomb. Police sources believe that Bedamani was only a bomb expert working with Manipuri and Assamese insurgents.

However due to lack of concrete proof Choudhury and the others arrested could not be convicted. Government offices, rail lines and the Gauhati and Dibrugarh radio stations were damaged by the terrorists.

It is not known whether there is any other bomb expert in PLA. But since the killing of Bedamani on September 29 there has not been any bomb explosion in Manipur.

It is feared that Manipur insurgents have acquired the technical knowhow for making bombs, the raw materials being supplied by international gun-runners. Booby traps planted at all strategic points are formidable threats to the security forces engaged in counter-insurgency operations in Manipur.

It appears that Assam students who were agitating for the deportation of foreigners had no link with SULA and that this underground group was ploughing a lonely furrow.

The Manipur police have made adequate arrangements to combat Chinese-trained insurgents. There is now a special squad of commandos trained in guerilla warfare. This was disclosed by Mr. Damodar Singh, Deputy Inspector General.

In the beginning of 1980 letter bombs were sent to those who in the extremists' view were responsible for the trials and tribulations of the people. After some months sophisticated bombs were used to damage oil pipelines. These terrorist activities gave a shot in the arm to the agitation leaders and apparently prompted the Centre to quicken the pace of talks.

Mr. Singh who has also commissioned a mounted squad to control traffic was confident of liquidating the insurgents. Policemen on horseback armed with long spears can effectively control traffic and disperse crowds in the event of riots, he said in reply to a question.

Gradually the extremists began using hand grenades which were reportedly supplied by Manipur insurgents.

According to him there is a 24-hour mobile squad to control underground activities.

These terrorist activities were new to the Assam police who were severely criticised for their failure to round up the extremists.

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