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Ammunition missing from Army dump

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A sensation has been caused in the security circles over the mysterious disappearance of a large quantity of sensitive ammunition from an army dump at Masimpur cantonment near Silchar.

The pilferage or theft is particularly noteworthy as Masimpur cantonment is a well-guarded installation close to Mizoram. It serves as a base and transit centre for the troops of the 57 mountain division looking after the insurgency-prone Mizoram.

The "stolen" ammunition inclu-

des 6,400 bullets of the 7.62 mm calibre Self-Loading Rifle (SLR) which is the standard infantry weapon of the army, the BSF and other para-military forces operating in the north-east.

More vital, the Mizo guerillas mainly use American G-3 or Chinese AK-47 (Kalashnikovs) automatic rifles of the same calibre as the Indian army's Ishapore rifle.

According to sources the "stolen" bullets can be easily used in the insurgents standard assault rifles.

The "theft" is believed to have occurred between December 26 and 27. Sixteen cases, each containing 400 bullets were found

missing. After initial inquiries, the army lodged an FIR with the police.

The Cachar district police, after some investigation, handed the case over to the CID. A CID team left Gauhati for Silchar on Friday. No arrest has been made so far. A number of persons, including army personnel are being questioned. The police as well as the army are tightlipped about the investigations.

Sources close to the security set-up in the region are surprised as to how such large quantities could have been stolen from a sensitive installation in an operation area. There is a distinct possibility that the "stolen" ammunition

is meant to be sold or given over to some insurgent groups, particularly the Mizos who are currently in the process of regrouping and preparing for a fresh round of insurgency just in case talks between the government and Laldenga fail.

"There could be hardly any other buyer for such large amounts of ammunition meant for automatic and semi-automatic weapons," a source said.

Sources said complicity of some insiders cannot be ruled out and it is not clear yet whether it was pilferage or theft.

The army too is believed to be setting up its own court or inquiry.

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