

Big holes in Bengal's security establishment

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Feb. 20: The massacre at Shilda and the resultant mudslinging within Bengal's security establishment have thrown up an embarrassing mix of mistakes and a potentially incendiary portent.

The mistakes: intelligence that officers do not find actionable, top officers feuding in public as well as passing the buck to juniors and tactical field decisions being altered to suit political expediency.

The portent: fishing in troubled waters by the outfit spearheading the Gorkhaland demand.

State home secretary Ardhendu Sen today sought to

put the lid on the "differences" he had with director-general of police Bhupinder Singh on whether there was prior intelligence input on the Maoist mobilisation in Shilda.

Reacting to Singh's assertion yesterday that he did not have any intelligence input on a build-up, Sen said: "Everything will come out after the probe. I had a talk with the DG today. He told me that the media was quoting him out of context and creating controversies. I agree."

Sen had earlier this week said that three hours before the attack, he had an intelligence input that a Maoist build-up was taking place near Shilda and the DGP was also aware of this, something Singh has disputed.

A senior police officer said such a dispute was "irrelevant" because there was no intelligence report on an attack on the camp — a point Sen had also stressed.

"The DGP appears to be correct because the information the intelligence branch provides is vague. In one sheet of paper, there will be 10 such 'build-ups' mentioned, which keep coming several times a week," the officer said.

"It will be virtually impossible to go chasing after all such build-ups. First, the information provided are all one-liners and not detailed. Second, we don't have the necessary manpower."

Singh had said he was not "mad" that he would sit on a piece of information that

stated there would be an attack on a camp. His contention: why didn't the agency directly convey the alert to the Shilda camp, instead of giving it the same urgency as a "leave application"?

As the home secretary played down differences at Writers', another discordant note was struck in West Midnapore, the theatre of the Maoist strike.

Benoy Chakraborty, special IG of the Eastern Frontier Rifles, said: "I had repeatedly told the superintendent of police (Manoj Verma) about the poor infrastructure at the camp and the need to shift it to a better place. But he paid no heed..."

A section of police officers said the government

should not have bowed to the demands of the local CPM which had insisted that the camp be set up near a bustling market as it would then be close to the party office.

After a series of attacks on CPM leaders by the Maoists, the party had insisted over two years ago that the EFR camp be shifted from a safer site in an irrigation department bungalow on the outskirts of Shilda to the primary health centre that was attacked on Monday. The government succumbed to the pressure.

"The Maoists intended to annihilate us so we wanted the police to move closer to the party office," said Amiya Sengupta, the CPM zonal committee

secretary of Bimpur II.

Citizens facing threat to life are entitled to police protection but to locate a camp in the middle of a civilian populace is self-defeating.

The Gorkha Janmukti Morcha — the EFR personnel are mostly drawn from the hills — has injected an ominous element to this cocktail of fiascos.

The Morcha has said the "Gorkhas lay down their lives for Bengal, but their plea for statehood remains unheard".

Morcha leaders had said the only compensation for the policemen's deaths was Gorkhaland.

"Let us hope that the Gorkha policemen don't get incited," an officer said.



One of the two improvised explosive devices left behind by the Maoists five days back still lies in front of the EFR camp. (Sanjoy Chattopadhyaya)