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Why Maria didn't know where Karkare was on terror night

Investigations reveal that none of the top cops were accompanied by their radio operators. Also, Kamte's operator seems to be guilty of feeding the control room with wrong information

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The position and role of the wireless operators of ATS chief Hemant Karkare and Additional CP Ashok Kamte on 26/11 may provide some answers to the impasse between Kamte's widow, Vinita, and Crime Branch chief Rakesh Maria. Investigations by this newspaper have revealed that none of the operators accompanied the duo to Cama Hospital, and then later to Rang Bhawan.



While Karkare's operator had no communication with the Control Room on 26/11, Kamte's operator called thrice in the absence of his officer, but from three different wireless sets Pic: Satish malavade

While Karkare's operator had no communication with the Control Room, Kamte's operator called the control room thrice in the absence of his officer, but from three different wireless sets.

Interestingly, all these calls were made 10 minutes after Karkare's car had been ambushed. The operator - who was stationed near the Special Branch office - first called the control room at 12.17 am saying that his car had been fired at, but no one was injured.

He repeated the same information from the wireless sets of two more vehicles parked nearby in a span of 20 minutes.

Notably, Vinita's allegations of feigning ignorance about the position of Karkare and non-coordination against Crime Branch chief Rakesh Maria in her book, To The Last Bullet, are based considerably on the communication between Kamte's operator and the control room.

Maria, meanwhile, has threatened to resign if his name is not cleared in the matter.

Sources close to Maria say, while such information from Kamte's operator created confusion, there were close to 1,300 calls received by control room that night and it was not possible for Maria to listen to every call himself.

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"The control room staff was passing on information to Maria – and in turn, he was conveying the same to the forces in the field after confirming it," says an officer.

So when the then CP Hasan Gafoor asked Maria – at around 12.45 am – about Karkare's position, he naturally expressed ignorance as he did not have any definite information, sources said.

According to Vinita's book that quotes control room logs – when the CP inquired about Karkare's position – Maria said, "Sir... sir... He... He... Hemant was at CST Railway Station, sir, I'll find out his location and tell him to get in touch with you, right away, sir."

ROLE OF OPERATORS

In the absence of their wireless operators, sources said that Karkare and Kamte were communicating with their seniors on mobile phones. Because of this, there are no records of the exact movement of these officers in the control room.

Wireless operators are supposed to keep the control room informed of each and every movement of the police officer they accompany, on a minute to minute basis.



Crime Branch chief Rakesh Maria

Karkare's wireless operator, Nitin Mathane told investigators subsequently that the ATS chief got down from the official car near Anjuman Islam school, asking him and five bodyguards to stay in the car, while Kamte's official car was parked somewhere in between the road that connects CST to the Special Branch office.

Kamte's wireless operator was also asked to stay back.

"The last communication from Karkare was at around 11.30 pm, after JCP (traffic) Sanjay Barve called him on the wireless network seeking more Quick Response Team (QRT) men at Hotel Trident.

Karkare responded saying that it was not possible to send reinforcements as he was outside Cama hospital with two teams of QRT and other officers and that they were planning to enter Cama where a few terrorists were still holed up," a crime branch official said.

Another officer said, "Firstly, the wireless operators posted with IPS officers are expected to keep the control room informed about movement of the officers. Even if Karkare and Kamte had asked the operators to stay back and proceeded in another vehicle, the two should have informed the control room accordingly."

The officer adds that there is a dubious air about the communication between Kamte's operator and the control room.

"It is evident that Ismail and Qasab drove towards Vidhan Bhawan after gunning down the three officers at 12.07 am. Then 10 minutes later, Kamte's operator contacted the control room shouting, 'Amcha gadi var firing jhala ahe, pan konihi zakhmi nahi.' He said this from three different wireless sets in the next 20 minutes. So whose car was actually fired at? And if the terrorists had already left at 12.07 am, then who fired at the said vehicle?" he asked.

Sources said, another question that needs to be addressed is what were the QRT teams, which were deployed with Karkare doing during the shoot-out.

The QRTs, who are highly trained in armed combat, neither accompanied the three officers as escorts when the three officers decided to proceed towards St Xavier's College after hearing that a suspicious red-coloured car was parked there; nor did they enter Cama to help Additional CP Sadanand Date who was making frantic calls seeking assistance.

Crime branch sources say, the QRT had no clear instructions from superiors about their plan of action and so they stayed back outside Cama hospital, even as Karkare and Kamte left with the staff of Pydhonie ACP, Bhamre.

WHAT R R PATIL SAYS OF THE IMPASSE

Reacting over the controversy and the letter written by Maria threatening his resignation, Home Minister R R Patil said: "I have spoken to him a couple of times since (Friday) morning, but he hasn't said anything about it. He has not addressed any letter to me, but to the additional chief secretary (home). He wanted the government to clarify the facts in the context of Vinita Kamte's book. But why don't you (the media) allow the police to work. Writing about things, which have no basis, will harm the interest of the state."

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