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Porbandar encounter: Trouble brewing for IG Satish Verma?

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AHMEDABAD: IPS officer Satish Verma, who till recently spearheaded CBI's Ishrat Jahan fake encounter case investigation, could face trouble in the alleged bogus encounter case of Porbandar. The special investigation team (SIT) formed by the state government on the Gujarat high court's order claims to have found crucial evidence against Verma.

Three teams of SIT recently returned from Porbandar after completing first phase of probe into three encounters which had taken place in that town in 1996-97. In one of the cases, the SIT officials claim to have gathered evidence which point the needle of suspicion towards Verma. SIT officials claim that they have evidence to prove Verma's complicity in the encounter of Jasu Gagan Shial of Porbandar.

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The HC has asked the SIT to complete its probe in this matter by October 22. Verma had assisted CBI in its investigations into the Ishrat Jahan fake encounter of 2004, again on orders of the HC.

The three teams of the SIT - being headed by additional director general of police, law and order, Shivanand Jha - had questioned witnesses, doctors of government hospital who had conducted postmortem on the victims and also other cops who were involved in the encounter. After completing this phase of probe the teams came back on Saturday.

Three cases of custodial deaths including two encounters from the past have come to haunt IG Satish Verma. These three deaths had taken place in 1996-97, when Verma was posted as Porbandar SP.

Earlier this year brother of Jasu, Hiralal Gagan Shial, moved the Gujarat high court seeking a CBI inquiry into these cases on the grounds that the state police did not conduct thorough investigations even after specific directions issued by the HC in 1998. During Verma's tenure in Porbandar three persons - Jasu, Aher Ranmal Ram and Aher Narayan Jesti Bandhiya had died in police custody. Jasu and Ram died in encounter while they were in custody of Kutiyana police; while Bandhiya was found hanging from a tree beside a police station. Police claimed that Bandhiya had committed suicide after escaping from custody.

In Jasu's case the SIT claims to have found that a senior IPS officer then posted in Ahmedabad had given a tip-off to Verma who was then the superintendent of police, Porbandar. Based on this information Verma had headed a team to Kharwad in Porbandar where Jasu was hiding.

"We have got independent witnesses who saw Verma's operation. Verma in his weekly diary, which is maintained by all police officials, mentions that he had got the intelligence input and also that he was the supervisory officer of this case. This is additional evidence against him," said an SIT official.

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