

City cops find no proof against 26/11 SIM duo

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KOLKATA: Eleven weeks after Mukhtar Ahmed and Tausif Rehman were arrested for allegedly supplying SIM cards that were used in the Mumbai attack, investigators are yet to find any evidence to link them to the horrific terrorist strike. The duo got bail after about a month in custody. Kolkata Police's STF, which nabbed them, failed to make any charges stick. And Mumbai Police did not even seek their custody.

Mukhtar was a member of Jammu and Kashmir Police's counter-insurgency unit, and Tausif, a transport company employee, before STF sleuths pounced on them. STF chief Rajeev Kumar confirmed that the two were freed on bail but refused to give any details.

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Sources said Mukhtar and Tausif were granted bail by a metropolitan magistrate court in the second week of January and told not to leave Kolkata. Mukhtar, a Srinagar resident, has gone back to the Premantle Street house in central Kolkata where he stayed with his wife and in-laws (he had started driving an autorickshaw after moving to the city). Tausif is staying with his family at Beniapur's Ostagar lane. Family members and neighbours say the duo is still being interrogated by police and intelligence officials.

"Mukhtar has been asked not to go out of Kolkata. He spends most of the day at home. Hardly any of his neighbours talk with him now," said Sk Naushad Ali, a friend.

Within days of the attack, Mumbai Police had discovered that SIM cards used by the slain terrorists were purchased from Kolkata and adjoining areas. On December 4, Tausif was picked up by an STF team from Howrah station. Police claimed he had bought 30 SIMs from shops in Phears Lane, Park Circus and Beniapur in the name of his dead uncle Ashraf Naumani, who died in 2005.

Tausif later told interrogators that it was Mukhtar who had asked him to buy the SIM cards. Police later claimed that Mukhtar had used a Class XII student, too, to buy some SIMs. Mukhtar was arrested from a J&K guest house in Delhi's Chanakyapuri two days after Tausif's arrest. At the time, he was with J&K sub-inspector Lateef, who vouched for Mukhtar, but the Kolkata Police team, apparently, didn't believe Lateef.

It was later learnt that Mukhtar's brother had been killed by terrorists in Kashmir. A resident of Srinagar's Rehanbari, Mukhtar was roped in by a top officer of J&K Police for counter-insurgency operations. He reportedly planted SIMs and informers among LeT and other terrorist outfits so that their conversations and movements could be tracked.

To his interrogators in Kolkata, Mukhtar claimed that he had bought the SIM cards for the same purpose.

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