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3 schoolkids arrested for blast

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SALBONI/KOLKATA: After suspending three lower-level personnel, the state is unlikely to take any action against the seniors for the security breach that led to the Maoist ambush on the chief minister's convoy on Sunday. But three schoolkids have been arrested for the attack and charged with sedition (a non-bailable offence), conspiracy and use of explosives.

Two of them are Class IX students of Katapahari High School and the third is a Class VII student of a Lalgah school. They were returning from a Baul performance on Monday morning when police picked them up and lined them up with the four other 'suspects' arrested in the case.

The police's alacrity to pick up suspects from among the villagers was missing when the Maoists sneaked through the 'high security area' and planted the explosive. DG A B Vohra on Monday admitted that there were two constables standing very close to the spot where the IED was kept on Ranigunj Road to target the convoy of chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and two Union ministers, but did not spot it in the bushes. No checks were carried out on the stretch of the road between Kalaichandi Khal and Midnapore town, either. Worse still, the constables were not there when the blast happened.

"The constables were almost standing on the explosive," Vohra said. "Indeed, there were lapses." The DGP admitted that the state had the technical know-how to detect such explosives but they were not used in that particular stretch.

But despite the DGP's promise to haul up senior officers if found guilty of lapses, no action has been taken so far. Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee refused to comment when asked whether senior IPS officers would be punished for the goof-up.

Sources said the government may restrict its action to junior officers and is unlikely to take a tough stand on those heading the security arrangements. A senior home department official at Writers' Buildings said that the chief minister feels that it is no use punishing individuals for what happened on Sunday and that the government is more interested in taking a lesson from this and revamping the security system.

The DGP met with home secretary Asok Mohan Chakrabarti, ADG (CID) Bhupinder Singh, IG (law & order) Raj Kanojia and special additional CP Rajeev Kumar to overhaul security measures, including upgrading the chief minister's security.

A central intelligence team arrived at Salboni on Tuesday and met the 11 villagers through whose paddy fields Maoists had trailed the wire that triggered the explosion.

The sleuths wanted to know whether the villagers had deliberately not harvested the paddy to give cover to the Maoists. The central team is puzzled how the Maoists managed to plant the device without being seen by anyone. The use of ammonium nitrate has been confirmed.

Meanwhile, seven of those arrested by the West Midnapore police were produced in court and remanded in police custody till November 14. Two of them - Gopal Karanda and Dipak Pratihar - are from Lalgah's Katapahari and Sahadeb Mahato and Lakshmiratan Murmu are from Salboni's Birdhanpur. They - including the school students - have been charged with sedition, conspiracy, illegal assembly, use of explosives and attack on ministers.

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