

Times of India

Foreigners visiting terror zone identified

TNN 19 October 2009, 06:44am IST

KOLKATA: Intelligence officers have reportedly identified the two English-speaking foreigners who had sneaked into the Maoist-dominated forested terrains of Jharkhand and Lalgarh in April this year. During grilling, two top Maoist leaders reportedly revealed the names of the foreigner duo Allen Durand and Tim Smith.

According to intelligence sources, the duo arrived in India on April 22, introducing themselves as liaison officers of a foreign NGO interested to work in the tribal belts of India. The sources claimed that they reached the Maoist camp with Amitava Bagchi, a politburo member of CPI (Maoist). Bagchi was arrested by Jharkhand police around a month ago.

During interrogation, the top Maoist leader reportedly told the investigators that he used to liaise between the Indian Maoists and their overseas sympathizers.

"Bagchi used to collect funds from the Western countries. And recently, the Maoists have taken a new strategy to collect funds. They have been approaching several Western NGOs, highlighting the poverty and distressed condition of the tribals and collecting money for tribal welfare," said a senior intelligence officer. The two foreigners might have got in touch with Bagchi who posed as a rights and social activist responding to one such appeal, said sources.

The agencies, however, are still in the dark about the identity of the visitors, as both the foreigners had reportedly spent a few weeks in Jangalmahal deep into the forested terrain of Jharkhand and met the rebel leaders active in the area. They collected documents, photographs and video clippings of the tribal upsurge in Lalgarh.

"We have reasons to believe that the duo had sneaked into the area in the guise of NGO workers with some specific assignment. Their movements suggest that they had come for first-hand experience and were looking for information about the tribal movement," said an investigator. The probe suggests that after spending a few weeks in Jharkhand, the duo had entered Lalgarh. "During interrogation of some arrested rebel leaders in Jharkhand, it was learnt that they had left duo near Purulia border," said another investigator.

Senior officers of different intelligence agencies are worried and suspect that the Maoists have already managed to extract funds from some foreign NGOs. They are not even ruling out the possibility of foreign intelligence agents taking this opportunity and sneaking into the Maoist-dominated areas.

The intelligence agencies are now scanning the activities of some Western NGOs working here. "Till date, some Indian mass organisations and NGOs had been under our scanner, who were believed to be working as frontal wings of the red rebels. Now the NGOs with foreign connection who are working at

different pockets of Maoist-dominated states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal will also be under vigil," said a senior officer.

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