

KARNATAKA

NO "ACCIDENTAL TERRORISTS"

Subhash Gatade

A Karnataka dacoit with links to a radical Hindu rightwing group has confessed to having carried out the Hubli district court bombing of May 10, 2008. The blast took place as the first phase of polling for the Karnataka Assembly elections was on - in a magistrate's courtroom where cases against top SIMI leaders including Safdar Nagori were scheduled to be heard two days later.

(Dacoit with Hindu Outfit links behind Hubli blast, Indian Express, January 13, 2009)

Does anybody remember the bomb blasts in Hubli (Karnataka, May 2008) courts last year when preparations were on for the coming state assembly elections ? These blasts which took place on a holiday did not witness any casualty although they extensively damaged the court premises. But the most important part played by these blasts was the atmosphere it created in favour of the BJP.

As it always happens after any such mysterious sounding blasts, many innocents belonging to minority community were illegally detained and quite a few among them also were booked for their 'role' in the blasts. The police had promptly claimed that 'sleeper cells belonging to LeT and SIMI' had executed the blasts.

One still remembers the manner in which Sangh Parivar had tried to exploit the bomb blasts in its favour. The former Deputy Prime Minister, L K Advani, had even used the bomb blasts case to attack the Congress-led UPA government at the centre for 'soft-peddalling the issue concerning terror' and accusing it of responsibility 'for the increase in terrorist activities in the country'.

The Hubli bar association had followed many other bar associations in different parts of the country to immediately pass an 'unanimous' resolution that they would not defend any 'terrorists' supposed to be involved in the blasts. And when a conscientious lawyer named Ibrahim Jalagir tried to file bail application on behalf of the detained he came under organised attack. His office was vandalised and he alongwith his colleague were badly beaten up by the hoodlums.

Now when the BJP government is firmly in the saddle and the accused in the bomb blasts case have already spent months together behind jails, has come a news which is definitely not soothing to the ears of the saffron commanders. The IGP of North Karnataka Ragavendera Auradhkar recently addressed a press conference telling the media that the mysterious bomb blasts which had struck the Hubli courts last year were the handiwork of a criminal gang led by one Nagaraj Jambagi .

According to the IGP it was the same team which had planted a bomb on the Belgaum-Hubli highway last year. However, this bomb failed to explode as it was raining heavily. After high drama, the bomb squad had finally retrieved the bomb. In fact Nagaraj had led the gang which was also involved in seven murder cases allegedly in North Karnataka and several cases of abduction also. Interestingly the police had stumbled upon this gang while investigating the murder of a Bagalkot businessman.

Reporting about the incident, *Mailtoday* writes (13 Jan, 2009) :

Hindutva terror has struck Karnataka. The Karnataka police arrested nine persons with Sangh Parivar links for allegedly setting off a bomb in the court of the junior first class magistrate in Hubli May 2008. They were also accused of planting a live bomb on the Dharwad-Belgaum road. This points to the presence of Hindutva terror suspects in the state.

The police had initially blamed SIMI for both the Hubli court blast and the planting of the live bomb.

Police have also seized live bombs, gun powder, lethal weapons, Rs 11.08 lakh in cash, gold, silver and two motorbikes from them. Apart from Nagaraj Jambagi (24), a resident of Heggur Plot in Bilagi taluk; the arrested persons include Ramesh Pawar (24), Basavaraj Diggi (22), Manjunath Binjawadagi (19), Deepak Govinda-kar (28), Lingaraj Jalgar (24)—all from Bagalkot; Basavaraj Rugi (20) of Honakuppi village in Gokak taluk; Hanamanth Sainasakali (22), and Channabasappa Hunasagi (35) of Indi taluk in Bijapur.

Of course although the police do not seem to be forthcoming on divulging the political connections of the group and sharing the important information about its alleged Sri Ram Sene connections anyone familiar with the Hubli-Dharwad region would have many other details about the gang of criminals, their political affiliations and their other deeds.

Many residents of Bagalkot have been witness to the *Trishul Deekshe* ceremony in the area wherein many of the arrested had wholeheartedly participated. For the uninitiated it may be told that VHP international secretary Praveen Togadia had popularised this trident-wielding programme as part of mobilising Hindus. Nagaraj Hollbasappa Jambagi, the gang's leader has allegedly been associated with Sri Ram Sene (SRS), a 'saffron front'.

A social worker from Hubli told *Mailtoday* (Jan 13, 2009) that the '[b]ombings were part of an effort to set up a militant Hindutva organisation.' "Jambagi is reportedly the right hand man of SRS chief Pramod Mutalik (known as Karnataka's Togadia) who is setting up a Rashtra Raksha Army. He does not believe in the police or the armed forces. His people are given weapons training. There are several such groups here. They had a five-day training camp in Koodala Sangama recently."

It may be known that Pramod Mutalik happened to be the former Convener of the South India Unit of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and of the Bajrang Dal. He was dismissed in 2005-06 following inflammatory speeches made by him on the Baba Budan Giri issue and is presently the founder and National President of the Rashtriya Hindu Sena and of the Shreeram Sene, active in Karnataka. Mutalik had recently affiliated with the Shiv Sena of Bal Thackeray.

Few months back when Karnataka witnessed anti-Christian violence, Shreeram Sene had publicly claimed credit for the attacks and desecrations of Christian churches, schools and convents and thereafter for the attacks on protesting Christian youth, women and children by invading Christian properties. This open violence had forced Christians taking to blocking the streets in protest against police complicity and inaction against the fanatics.

The fact that the Karnataka happens to be a BJP ruled state where the police allegedly face political pressure and were unwilling to go on record about the Sangh Parivar links of the accused, the establishment would not be too willing to expose the real connections of the criminal-terrorists. Taking into consideration this dilly-dallying on part of the government organisations who had been fighting for communal harmony have raised a strong demand 'to arrest the National President of SRS Pramod Mutalik'. (Hubli court blast: Demand to arrest Shri Ram Sene chief, S.O. *News service*, Tuesday, 13 January 2009)

With pressure building up for his arrest, Pramod Mutalik has flatly denied any knowledge of Jambagi and his gang. Much on the lines of his Sangh veterans who were put on the defensive when their links with Sadhvi Pragya and others in the Malegaon bomb blast case became apparent, he declared that they do not hold SRS membership, although he promised legal aid to the accused. . It is a different matter that none from the Sangh Parivar network maintains any membership register which suits them in dissociating the 'parent organisation' from any wrongdoing of its associates. Inadvertently or so Pramod Mutalik was imitating his other Sangh Parivar veterans especially BJP leadership which had denied any knowledge of the Malegaon accused but had readily agreed to defend them. He was even ready to 'start an agitation to defend them.'

'Indian Express' (13 Jan 2009) further adds that according to IGP Auradhkar Jambagi had procured the bombs from one Hanumant Sainsakali, a 22-year-old technical diploma student from Indi on the Maharashtra border. It is worth noting that investigations in the aftermath of the bomb blasts in the Hubli courts had shown that the bomb was similar to the one used in the May 18, 2007 blast at Hyderabad's Mecca Masjid.

One needs to remember that when the Malegaon investigations had started involvement of Hindutva terrorists in similar incidents had also come under scanner. The Mecca Masjid blasts as well as blasts in Samjhauta Express which had remained unsolved were further investigated. Although initially the ATS Maharashtra had not deciphered any connection with Karnataka with the Malegaon blasts as of now there seems to be a qualitative change in the picture. Karnataka connection to the Malegaon blast is also being explored.

There is no denying the fact that Hubli which happens to be a small town situated 425 km northwest of Bangalore, and which had remained more famous for many stalwarts of Hindustani and Karnataka classical music living in its environs, is a pale image of itself today. No lover of classical music would have ever imagined in their wildest dreams that a day would arise when it would be witness to a music of a different kind. □□□