

# First forensic trail left by terrorists

Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

**Mumbai:** The unexploded scooter bomb at Naigaum Cross Road had not only linked the serial blasts to the Memon family but it also turned out to be the first forensic trail left behind by the terrorists. The 1993 blasts saw the first of many things, including the most crucial pencil-timers, advanced devices which were used to detonate explosives.

Back then, the discovery of pencil-timers by Mumbai's forensic experts had drawn global attention besides appraising the local police about the challenge they were up against. The timers, fitted in pencil-like devices, which had a glass capsule containing sulphuric acid enclosed in a copper container, were highly ad-

vanced in terms of engineering, and their use against civilians was almost never heard of in forensic history. Picking up from there, a core team of 20 forensic experts had worked relentlessly for three months, to scientifically relate every bit of evidence to the perpetrators.

Dr Rukmani Krishnamurthy, the then head of the explosives department at the Forensic Science Laboratory, recollected how it was the biggest challenge of their careers. "It was also a milestone for India's forensic science scene in many ways as our findings were later lauded and validated by Interpol," she told TOI.

The forensic experts had never before dealt with RDX of that proportion. Krishnamurthy said, "We had only taken



baby steps to understanding RDX when the blasts took place." But that was hardly a deterrent. They also went on to find that the 20kg RDX in the scooter was embedded with 200 tiny pieces of cast iron rods, which if the bomb had exploded, would have done damage equivalent to 200 bullets. The forensic teams later went on to find the iron rods from all 12 sites, thereby establishing a pattern, and also that the attacks were carried out to

cause maximum damage.

The RDX residue collected from all blast sites also matched with samples collected from the homes of Memons and several other accused. Krishnamurthy remembered how even cufflinks of drivers who drove the explosive-laden vehicles reeked of RDX. "It became crucial evidence to nail them later," she said.

In the three months of frenzy following the blasts, the FSL campus in Kalina resembled a warzone. Police would collect truckloads of evidence, including debris, severed limbs, clothes, or anything from the blast sites and take it to the lab. All cars damaged in the explosions were also dumped at the campus for forensic scientists to establish which carried the explosives. Here again, the

cast iron rods depending on whether they were stuck outside or inside the vehicle, provided vital clues. Once indentified, the chassis numbers of cars took the investigators back to the Memons. "This is how we proved that the Memons had purchased 12 cars to carry out the attacks," Krishnamurthy said.

Since then, Krishnamurthy, who is currently chairman-CEO of Helik Advisory Ltd, has presented the findings in Paris, Hong Kong and China, besides discussing with Interpol the profiling of the seized RDX. In 1993, Krishnamurthy's quick thinking to send experts to sites paid off. Ironically, even today, police do not consider it important to involve forensic experts in crime scene investigations.