

## Policing the bribe

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I WANT either less corruption or more chance to participate in it. So said Ashleigh Brilliant and so thought most of the 6,500 persons who are alleged to have paid bribes to get themselves recruited to Uttar Pradesh's police force. Unfortunately for them, the Samajwadi Party lost power, and the new regime undid the recruitments.

Such vindictive action against political opponents does not shock. People are used to seeing new governments not only undoing appointments but changing the policies of earlier regimes. But even if one does not accept all the findings of the inquiry committee set up by the new government, it is obvious that considerable bungling occurred in these recruitments. Money of course changed hands, but caste affiliation also played an important role. In fact the bribes were graded along caste lines, with those belonging to the lower castes reportedly having to pay less. Politics of corruption combined with the politics of vote bank, you could say.

In the entire process of faulty recruitment, nobody apparently bothered about the impact that this would have on the police as an organisation and the quality of policing in UP. An organisation is as good or as bad as its personnel. This is true of all organisations, but more so of the police, where the conditions of service and professional requirements are highly exacting. In addition, the police is the only public service that is authorised to exercise coercive power over citizens, which makes the maintenance of recruiting standards vital.

Standards to combat corruption in the police set by Interpol stress three important principles: make corruption within the police a high-risk crime; promote and maintain a high standard of honesty, integrity and ethical behaviour within the police forces; and ensure that high levels of integrity, honesty, ethical standards and expertise are ensured in recruitment. The actions of the Mulayam Singh's government negated all these principles.

It is no use blaming only those who paid bribes to join the police, given the pressures of high unemployment rate and lack of professional options. We need to inquire into those who took bribes and broke the rules. That is where the rot lies. If these people were, in turn, pressured by politicians to do this, it makes them doubly culpable.

This is not the first time that the process of police recruitment has been violated on a massive scale. As far back as 1963, the Bihar Police Commission had recommended the establishment of a police service commission to recruit for the Bihar Police Service. More recently, the Soli Sorabjee Committee set up to draft a model Police Act has recommended that recruitment to the non-gazetted ranks in the police be done by a state-level police recruitment board.

Mayawati will obviously try and gain political mileage from this scandal. However, she should ensure that such practices don't take place under her rule. Designing and following sound recruitment standards would be the first step. So far the Mayawati government hasn't shown any inclination to do this.