

## **Police reforms**

### **Union government should take the lead**

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While addressing heads of police forces in the country in a meeting held in New Delhi some months ago, Mr. L. K. Advani, Union home minister, mentioned that *suraksha* (security) of the common man was as vital as his *shiksha* (education) and *swasthya* (health). He echoed what the United Nations had recognized long ago. The UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 1995 said: "To feel safe from crime is as important to a person as access to food, shelter, education and health."

Providing a sense of security to the common man is dependent on the establishment of a police force which is efficient, honest and professional. Do we have such a police force? Not if we go by the findings of various commissions, the complaints received by the human rights commissions, reports in the press and experiences of the common man. In fact, the Union home secretary, Mr. Kamal Pande told a group of probationary Indian Police Service officers during the last passing out parade held in the National Police Academy, Hyderabad, how rotten the police system had become. He is reported to have told the trainees that while the law-abiding public suspects the police, those who operate on the wrong side of the law do not fear them.

### **COMMITTEES**

The question that should have been put to the Union home secretary is – what has the Union government done to improve the police system? It has appointed commissions and committees. The appointment of the working group on police by the Administrative Reforms Commission in 1966 was the first sign of the Union government's interest. This was followed by the setting up of the Gore Committee on police training in 1971. Then came the most significant initiative – the appointment of the first National Police Commission after Independence. Recently, the Union government again became active. It first set up the Ribeiro Commission on police reforms in 1998 on the direction of the Supreme Court and last year sprang a surprise by the sudden announcement of another committee- the Padmanabhai Committee on police reforms.

Despite all the expert bodies, the quality of policing has continued to deteriorate. The reason? No government at the centre or in the states has shown interest in implementing the recommendations.

Then why this pretence of appointing committees and wasting public money? The central government, for instance, must answer many question about the Padmanabhai Committee. Why was this committee appointed when the major recommendations of the NPC remained unimplemented. Why was the composition of the committee confined to police officers (it consisted of four police officers – two serving and two retired – functioning under a retired bureaucrat)? Anyone who has glanced through the report realises how the finding and recommendations of the committee have been influenced by the composition of the committee.

The report was submitted by the committee to the central a government in October 2000. Till now, the report has not been released to the public. There was no consultation with

public or civil society organizations when the committee was appointed and it is not considered necessary to have a public debate on a subject which actually concerns the community. While governments and people in other countries have realised that policing is too serious a business to be left to policemen alone, we are yet to do so.

### **NARROW MINDED**

The need for police reforms at the state level has never been adequately recognized by the Union government. A substantial part of the Union government's expenditure on policing is actually incurred on the growth and upkeep of five central paramilitary forces like the BSF, CRPF, ITBP, CISF and Assam Rifles, which do not really do policing in a strictly traditional sense of the term. The Ministry of Home Affairs' demand for grants for the year 1999-2000 showed that the amount voted for the police was about Rs.690 crores, out of which the voted estimate of expenditure on these five organizations alone was Rs. 478 crores. Thus the remaining 30 per cent of the Union government's budget was meant for the maintenance of police forces of Union Territories, including the Delhi Police forces of Union Territories, including the Delhi Police and also on the modernisation of state police forces.

Most state governments have neglected the development of their police forces and have instead preferred to depend heavily on the central paramilitary assistance to meet urgent law and order needs. This heavy dependence on the central assistance has been the result as well as the cause of comparatively poor development of state police forces. State governments requisition central assistance on the ground that their own police forces lack adequate strength, arms, equipment and training to deal with tough situations effectively. The availability of central assistance in turn allows state governments to keep on neglecting the need to strengthen and modernise their police forces.

Policing is not the direct responsibility of the Union government as the police and public order are in the state list. The Union government has often taken refuge behind these provisions of the Constitution and washed its hands of the entire responsibility of initiating action to introduce reforms in the police. This is a narrow and short-sighted approach.

### **GENUINE WILL**

The Union government has always had the option of implementing the important recommendations of the NPC by introducing the model Police Bill drafted by the NPC in the Union Territories. If it had done so, it would have acquired the moral authority to ask the state governments to follow suit. It never did that and thus failed to convince state governments about its genuineness in implementing the NPC's recommendations.

The Union government can and should take the lead in introducing reforms in the police. It has the capacity to encourage state governments to reform their police forces by setting norms and standards, issuing policy directions and making the release of central grants dependent on police performance and behaviour. What is required is genuine interest and will to bring about police reforms.

The police in this country are about two million strong. This huge reservoir of manpower can do enormous good to society, provided they are utilized to serve the community and not as an instrument to serve the interests of the elite and people in positions of power. The need for police reforms is self evident and urgent. It is in fact essential for establishment of

good governance and achievement of economic progress. It is time the central as well as the state governments realised this.