

False Proposition on the Strength of the Police Force

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A major drive to expand the police force is under way and the government contends that “United Nations norms” on the police-population ratio have to be met. Are its arguments justified?

A number of recent killings – 24 armed police personnel of Eastern Frontier Rifles at Silda (West Bengal), 76 personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in Chintalnar (Dantewada, Chhattisgarh) in April, the bus bombing in May also in Dantewada district that killed 31, many of whom were civilians, and most recently the killing of 27 CRPF jawans in Narayanpur (Chhattisgarh) – has occasioned renewed demand for recruiting more police personnel and raising additional battalions.

No less than the union home secretary had earlier said, “our police requirement today is roughly three and half lakhs short....we want to reach the UN [United Nations] average and to get to it I need another five lakh policemen. So we need to recruit eight lakh over next five years...” (*Economic Times*, 19 April 2010). The UN, it is claimed, recommends 222 police personnel for every 1,00,000. In India, it is said, the average is 125 per 1,00,000.¹ The ministry of home affairs has claimed that states allocate only 4.3% on police in their budget. As a result, some states have a poor police to people ratio, such as Bihar which has 60 police personnel for 1,00,000 and this becomes even less if one disaggregates the urban from the rural. Thus, against a sanctioned strength of 52 for all police stations in the country in some it is as low as 12 as in Madhya Pradesh and 13 in Orissa. While this would tend to justify the demand for more police personnel, there is a need for abundant caution in expanding the police force.

For one, when the UN refers to police it means civil police as part of criminal justice system, i e, crime fighting and prevention, and not armed police who are but a paramilitary force. The difference between armed and civilian police is significant, in terms of their training and mandate.² Although the armed police is used for quelling riotous situations, these are for short period deployment under magisterial supervision and are often unlike prolonged

use to suppress insurgencies. Yet, when the demand is made to augment the police force, it is not clear if the demand is for expansion of the civil police or for the armed police. Which expansion is the Union Home Secretary referring to? While the UN speaks of a civil police-people ratio in India it is transformed to justify augmenting the strength of the paramilitary forces.

Moreover, when it is said that the average size of the police force is 125 for every 1,00,000, what is forgotten is that in areas where the government is carrying out paramilitary and military operations, there is a very heavy deployment of forces.

Take the 34 districts spread over seven states (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Orissa, and West Bengal) being singled out for operations against “Left Wing Extremists” (LWE), have a deployment of 75 battalions of central paramilitary forces, along with an equal number of state armed police battalions. In addition there are the India Reserve Battalion, Special Police Officers (SPOs) (Chhattisgarh has 4,500 of them who get on an average Rs 3,500 per month) as well as Home Guards, Village Defence Committees (under various names such as Salwa Judum, Sendra, Shanti Sena....). A number of police stations in these districts have on an average 100 to 250 personnel, that is two to five times the sanctioned strength. These are supplemented by an armed force camp every 5 to 10 kms with 15-200 personnel. District headquarters have up to 500 personnel.

Thus, in these 34 districts the ratio of armed police to population is much higher and is conservatively as much as 3,000 police for every 1,00,000 people.³ These forces are paid reasonably well, especially after the award of the Sixth Pay Commission, and contrary to conventional wisdom, are equipped with modern weapons.

The point is that a massive augmentation of a paramilitary force is under way, this time in the name of fighting LWE. The Union Home Secretary said last year, i e, in 2009: “We recruited 80,000. This year, we will recruit a lakh and a half...” One wonders that if normalcy or near normalcy has returned to J&K and to large parts of the north-east, then what happens to the forces that have been raised on the ground

of dealing with these conflicts? Or is it that every real and imagined conflict is but an excuse to further raise the strength of the force to augment the fighting arm of the State rather than find the courage and imagination to pursue democratic resolution of a plethora of problems? And one may add, to even ponder the sheer wastefulness of employment generation in a sector which is non-productive?

Thus fundamental flaw lies in hyping internal security which enjoys so much priority that no one bothers to interrogate any longer its rationale or the premises behind expansion of security. In other words, it is not the lack of forces on the ground in the 34 LWE districts which is the core issue, but rather a lack of will to address the fundamental problems of land grab, displacement, privatisation of forest and water resources of the adivasis that is the matter. It is this that is fuelling, and will continue to fuel armed resistance, notwithstanding the call to strengthen the armed police.

NOTES

- 1 I tried to track down the source for this so-called UN recommendation. I turned for help to Bibek Debroy who was very helpful and provided me with two documents but also clarified that the actual reference is tucked away somewhere in a UN regional report on public sector reform on Africa from 2000-01. Failing to locate it on the net I then approached Ramesh Chandar in the United Nations Information Centre. His librarian after a search sent me a press kit for 12th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice held on 12-19 April 2010 in Brazil. The significant thing to note is that the Fact Sheet 2 says that "The data from the UN-CTS shows a median of approximately 300 police officers per 1,00,000 population worldwide for 2006...." Even more surprising is another fact sheet in the press kit from the South African Institute of Race Relations whose title speaks for itself, namely, "The safest province has the least police to population ratio-24th April 2008!"
- 2 E N Rammohan, former director-general of police (DGP) of the Border Security Force and tasked to inquire into the 6 April killing of CRPF jawans at Chintalnar (Chhattisgarh) told *Times of India* (2 May 2010) in an interview that "(a) person from the central paramilitary force is half a soldier. He is trained to attack, shoot and kill. An Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, on the other hand, is taught the laws of the land and how to enforce the laws. He/she is taught to be moderate....Firing is absolutely the last resort..."
- 3 The population of 33 LWE districts (this excludes three districts of West Bengal) is approximately 42 million as per 2001 Census. (Annexure 1 "Key Indicators of LWE districts as per DLHS III, District Health Action Plan for 33 LWE Affected Districts, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare). District-wise this varies from a low of 2.14 lakh for Deogarh

in Orissa to 83.11 lakh for Rayagada also in Orissa. As per the MHAs annual report for 2009-10 there are already 58 battalions of central paramilitary forces, 24 battalions of India Reserve Battalion (IRB) and 10 battalions of COBRA. In addition, 13 more battalions of IRB are being raised. As of now there are 92 battalions. The size of a CRPF battalions is approximately 1,200 plus. In addition, there are state armed police and SPOs. Figures for these are not officially available, but there is anecdotal evidence. For instance, Chhattisgarh Police spokesperson IG R K Vij told *rediffmail* in an interview on 8 April 2010 that the police stations in the state earlier had 10 to 13 personnel but now their strength has gone up to 70. Indeed, the police force has climbed from 21,000 in 2005 to 50,000 now. Of course he does not specify whether these were civil or armed police formations. It is reasonable to assume that most of the new recruits were for the armed police. The IG also mentions that it is 130 police stations out of 370 which are LWE-affected and that the anti-Maoist operation is being carried out in only two districts of Dantewada and Bijapur. (This is incidentally true of Jharkhand as well, where, for instance, Palamau, Hazaribagh, etc, are excluded and in Orissa, Sambalpur is excluded). In other words even among the 33 districts there are some districts which are excluded. In addition it is not as though every police station in the affected districts is reinforced. Keeping all this in mind and assuming that Chhattisgarh illustrates the point, if we look at the deployment, then in Dantewada and Bijapur with a population of 7.19 lakh (until 2005-06 Bijapur was part of Dantewada) and deployment of 10 battalions of CPMFs and equal, if not more, of armed police and SPOs the ratio of the number of police personnel to the population is more than 3,000 for every 1,00,000 (7,19,000 population and 22,000 police force).



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