

Reforms money can't buy

In a refreshingly progressive move, the Government of India (GoI) has approved a Rs 25,000-crore internal security scheme to strengthen the law and order apparatus, modernise state police forces and enhance their capacity to combat terrorism. The umbrella scheme, Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF), will be implemented between 2017 and 2020. It has been hailed as "one of the biggest moves towards police modernisation in India." The scheme has special provisions for women's security, mobility of police forces, logistical support, hiring of helicopters, upgradation of police wireless, satellite communications, crime and criminal tracking network and systems (CCTNS) and e-prisons. The idea is to assist the states to upgrade their police infrastructure, especially in respect of transport, communications and forensic support, to enable them to effectively tackle the emerging challenges.

Out of the total outlay, the Centre will provide Rs 18,636 crore or about 75 per cent while the states' share will be Rs 6,424 crore. Under the scheme, J&K, north-eastern states and states affected by Left-Wing Extremism will get a boost of Rs 10,132 crore.

It may be recalled that following the 14th Finance Commission recommendations, which increased the state's share of central taxes from 32 per cent to 42 per cent, the Centre de-linked eight centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) from its support in 2015. These schemes included modernisation of police. The explanation given was that with a higher devolution of resources to the states, they should be able to shoulder the additional burden. We were also told that while central funding of modernisation of police was being stopped, non-plan funding for the same would continue.

The arrangement may have been theoretically sound but it did not work in practice. The majority of state governments were disinclined to make any investments in police. As a consequence, modernisation schemes received a setback. Several state police chiefs expressed concern that the battle against Maoists and terrorists of different hues was going to be affected with modernisation grants drying up. Fortunately, the home ministry woke up to the danger in good time and decided to revert to the old arrangement whereby funds for modernisation were released every year. The Cabinet Committee on Security is to be complimented for this decision.

The prime minister had, while addressing the directors general of police in Guwahati on November 30, 2014, enunciated the concept of SMART Police. Smartness has two dimensions - external and internal. The external dimension refers to the uniform a policeman wears, the way he carries himself, his weapons, the communication equipment on his person, his mobility, response time, et al. The umbrella scheme would definitely take care of these aspects. It would, no doubt, enhance his capabilities to respond to and deal with the kind of challenges he is confronted with in his day to day work. But the internal dimension of smartness is far more important. As the PM expanded the acronym, the police should be strict and sensitive, modern and mobile, alert and accountable, reliable and responsible, tech-savvy and trained. Unfortunately, there has been hardly any progress in this direction and the umbrella scheme touches upon only some of these essential qualities.

Mobility would certainly increase, and so would alertness. But you just cannot have a sensitive police under the existing dispensation when the police are answerable to the political executive. What we have today is Ruler's Police. What we need is People's Police. The police have been accused, with fair justification, of being insensitive to the poor and tribals. Accountability has to be to the Constitution, the laws of the land and the people of the country. Reliability would increase only when the police are objective, fair and impartial. Gadgetry won't help here. It is the state of mind which matters. And to achieve that state of mind, police must be freed from the stranglehold

of politicians. Technology would definitely be of great help - it would, in fact, act as a force multiplier. But bereft of sensitivity and accountability to the people, its gains would be limited.

All said and done, the central government has taken a quantum leap. The umbrella scheme is a positive step and generous financial grants will definitely help. But these must be followed up by structural reforms in the police. The roadmap for the same was laid down by the Supreme Court in 2006. Institutions like the state security commission, police establishment board and complaints authority must be set up in every state in keeping with the directions of the Court. Some states have set up these bodies, but packed them with political stooges, limited their charter and curtailed their powers. Whatever limited compliance is claimed, has actually been farcical. It is time that the Govt seriously thinks about bringing police and public order in the Concurrent List of Schedule VII of the Constitution. Constitutional experts like Fali S. Nariman have strongly spoken in favour of such an amendment.

We take great pride in India being one of the fastest growing economies in the world. However, tragically, we are ignoring a simple truth - sustained economic progress needs the solid foundation of good law and order, and we cannot have good law and order in the country unless the police are reorganised, restructured and rejuvenated. Cosmetic improvements will not do. Reforms of a fundamental nature are called for. The colonial police must go. We must have a police committed to giving security to the people, protecting the honour of women, upholding the human rights of all sections, being fair to the minorities and sensitive to the poor and tribals, and above all upholding the rule of law.

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com