

# U.P. Police Capable Of Curbing Riots

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THE recent wave of communal riots in Uttar Pradesh have led to a number of ill-informed statements about the failure of the security forces to control the violence. What is overlooked was the fact that if it is so, it is due to the culmination of ill-conceived policies adopted by practically every government in the state for the last two decades.

The proposal floated by the home ministry for a composite force is not based on facts and appears to have been put forward to deflect attention from the mistakes made by the political executive. At present, the Uttar Pradesh police is a composite force. This composition has been the subject of several assembly questions and there are standing instructions to recruit more Muslims and members of scheduled castes.

## Present Percentage

Their present percentages are roughly as follows: Muslims-- 10 per cent as against their population of 12 per cent; scheduled castes--15 per cent, a little less than their reservation of 18 per cent; OBCs-- about 20 per cent. Of these, two castes, the Jats and Yadavs, are represented beyond their numerical proportion. However, this is due to merit as they do much better than the so-called higher-castes in physical efficiency tests.

If this is not composite, what constitutes a composite force? If the reformers are sincere they should concentrate on removing the distortions in police policy which have crept under every administration in the state for the last 20 years.

The first and most important step should be that the chief minister should dissociate himself from postings and transfers and should not interfere in technical police operations. This was the main reason why Charan Singh succeeded in virtually eradicating communal riots in Uttar Pradesh in 1970. But now day-to-day interference by chief ministers in police administration has become so much the rule that it almost appears that the chief minister becomes ineffective if he does not do so. It would be worthwhile examining how and what Charan Singh did in this regard.

He maintained strict discipline in the police by dealing sternly with police officers who tried to bring political pressure to bear on him. He boldly announced in the state assembly that till that day all crime statistics in the state were bogus, and henceforth all crimes would be registered. Crime statistics shot up but he convinced the legislature and the press that the administration had taken the correct step.

Next he told all the district magistrates and superintendents of police that the maintenance of law and order was their mandatory duty and there was no question of their shirking their responsibility and seeking instructions from any higher authorities. The chief minister made it clear that even the slightest violation of law and order should not be condoned. If someone so much as threw a stone at a streetlight he had to be arrested and prosecuted. With such strict guidelines, communal violence died a natural death.

Charan Singh announced that

the government would not withdraw any prosecutions and would not grant remissions in jail sentences or parole except in rare circumstances. He made it clear that except for serving members of the legislatures, no special concessions were to be made in jail to those who claimed to be political prisoners. Chief ministers could well learn from Charan Singh's example and not equate police administration with the transfers of inspectors and sub-inspectors.

For the last two decades there has been no chief minister in any state who has given a thought to improving the police force; they have been content to collect slips from their M.L.A.s about postings and transfers and putting pressure on their police chiefs. Just a few months ago, the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, Mr Sunderlal Patwa, got rid of an efficient and honest DG of police in order to get certain officers postings of their choice.

It is well known that inflammatory cassettes played a big role in the recent riots. Those who produced these cassettes, those who sold them and those who listened to them could all have been prosecuted under section 153A, IPC. However, since the ministry of home affairs itself set the trend by ignoring Bhindranwale's cassettes in Punjab and cassettes produced on the Shah Bano case, it was helpless.

Inflammatory speeches led to the Nellie massacre in February 1983 but no one was arrested or prosecuted. The Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid openly exhorted his audience to break the bones of Muslim ministers and legislators who did not toe the line. Instead of prosecuting him, he was courted by politicians. Many honest superintendents of police registered cases under section 153A, IPC, against those who made inflammatory speeches but their requests for government sanction for prosecutions have so far been ignored.

## Dismal Picture

In spite of this dismal picture, there are signs of hope. Failing to maintain law and order is proving too costly for senior political leaders. On the eve of the November 1989 elections, Urdu was declared the second official language in Uttar Pradesh. There were vicious communal riots in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The massacre of Muslims, especially in Bhagalpur, led to the loss of at least 40 Lok Sabha seats for the Congress and Mr Gandhi lost his prime ministership. Now Mr Chenna Reddy has lost his chief ministership and Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav is in trouble. It is the prospect of losing votes that will ultimately make politicians see sense.

Our politicians have invariably taken into consideration the religion and caste of a police officer dealing with communal riots. If they read a brief history of the post-1947 communal riots in India, they will understand that this is an irrelevant exercise. The only pertinent question is whether he is professionally competent or not. In one of the worst ever communal riots in Ahmedabad in 1969, four of the seniormost officers were neither Hindus nor Muslims.