Governance

Police Reform—the Need of the Hour*

NN Changkakoti

This important article is being reproduced from the oldest circulating English Daily Newspaper of Assam, The Assam Tribune of December 8, 2008. It has been written in the wake of the 26th November, 2008 terrorist attack on Mumbai. The Prime Minister himself in one of his recent speeches has spoken about the importance and urgency of police reform all over the country. Other dignitaries, media, intellectuals and intelligentsia have also supported such a move. Under this background this article on the subject of police reform in Assam gains special significance. The author of the article Shri N.N. Changkakoti himself is a distinguished policeman with long experience. He rose to the position of Director General of Police in the State before he retired.

Shri Changkakoti was invited by the State Government to serve as the Chairman of a high-level committee to look into ‘the health of the State police set-up and recommend measures for improving their effectiveness in dealing with the requirement of the current situation.’ The committee came out with many important recommendations within seven months record time. In the words of the author himself, it was a comprehensive report. It is rather disappointing to recall that the recommendations made by the committee have remained un-implemented. It is, however, good that Shri Changkakoti is coming out with this article at a critical juncture in our nation’s life in general and that of Assam in particular. Shri Changkakoti has drawn attention to the major recommendation of the report of the special committee and also to some steps that the Government of Assam should promptly implement.

Any observer or student of North-eastern affairs ought to read this article to derive the correct perspective of the functioning of Assam’s police department now and in the future.

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In the wake of the well planned barbaric attack by terrorists in seven locations in Mumbai city within a couple of hours on the night of November 26 last, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh in his address to the nation on the following day, has rightly admitted the need of police reform and pledged to attend to the matter urgently and seriously ‘so that the law and order authorities can work unitedly, effectively and in a determined manner to tackle such threats to national integrity.’

So far as Assam is concerned, the need of police reform to make the State police force capable of performing all the police duties effectively was felt way back in 2001 by the then government of Assam led by the present Chief Minister, and accordingly the government had constituted in the month of November 2001, a high level committee on police reforms with myself as the Chairman and SV Subramanian, IPS (Retd), L David, IPS the then DGCD & CGHG Assam, DN Saikia, IAS, the then Secretary, Home Department, Assam, Khagen Sarma, IPS, IGP(SB), Assam and late Bipul Kalita, IPS, IGP (Retd) as members to examine the health of the State police set-up, and recommend measures for improving their effectiveness in dealing with the requirements of the current situation. There were many terms of reference. Realising the urgency of the matter, the committee, after taking the views of some leading citizens, representatives of major political parties of the State, retired police officers, Director General of Police, Assam and representatives of different police associations and after visiting some police establishments and institutions in and outside Assam including the passport check-post at Sutarkandi in Karimganj district and the nearby Assam–Bangladesh international border, ignoring the very dusty and back–breaking condition of the road from Karimganj to Sutarkandi, submitted, within seven months, its comprehensive report formally to the Chief Minister of Assam.

While preparing the report, it was strongly felt that for bringing about required reform in the police force of the State, primary importance must be given to improve the quality and competence of the ‘man behind the machine.’ Accordingly, specific and detailed recommendations have been given in the report for, (a) ensuring selection of the right human material for induction in to the force, eliminating all extraneous influences and inclusion of a psychologist in each selection committee, (b) proper restructuring and upgradation of the training centres for armed and unarmed branch personnel, updating of training syllabi and increasing the duration of the training to enable the trainees to assimilate the instructions and acquire the required skills properly, posting of competent training staff with the incentives and improving the quality of refresher, specialized and pre-promotion courses and making all the personnel to undergo these courses at appropriate intervals, (c) regular and thorough inspection of subordinate establishments by senior officers as per manual rules, and close monitoring of the work of the subordinates through effective supervision and intelligently planned surprise checks, (d) improving the behaviour of the police towards the public and, (e) making the department corruption free. The need of the senior officers to set proper examples on integrity, work-ethics, professionalism, public relations etc was specially emphasized.

Another major recommendation of the committee was for creation of a large number of new police stations and outposts, giving priority to bordering and riverine areas. The
committee opined that every district having major inhabited Char areas should have one or more police stations under the control of the superintendent of police of the district concerned, and where solid land is not available for construction of police station buildings, the same may be located in two/three big boats joined together. Specific suggestions were also given for adequately strengthening the police stations and outposts through provision of required additional manpower, vehicles, weapons and other equipments. Further, in order that work of investigation of cases does not suffer because of law and order, security, etc., duties of sub-inspectors in any thana, it has been strongly recommended to separate the law-and-order and investigation work by posting required number of additional sub-inspectors and superior staff exclusively for the work of investigation of cases.

On the other hand, keeping in view particularly the insurgency scenario of the State, a large number of concrete suggestions have been given in the report for strengthening the special branch for being able to gather hard actionable intelligence as required. In this connection, it was also emphasized that no officer should be posted as Superintendent of Police of a district, if he had not undergone an intelligence course conducted by the Intelligence Bureau, Government of India. The need of strengthening the Battalions and District Armed Police wings, to begin with, by filling up the existing vacancies, was also pointed out. There are many other useful recommendations in the report to make Assam Police capable of fulfilling its objectives.

However, it is unfortunate that the sense of urgency and seriousness which was displayed by the committee in submitting its report was not reflected in the handling of the report by the government and most of the suggestions of the committee have remained without due attention. If the recommendations of the committee were acted upon with due earnestness and in right spirit, many of the tragic incidents like bomb blasts on October 30 last could have been prevented. Even though more than six years have passed since the submission of the report, it has not become outdated and it will be prudent on the part of the government to implement the recommendations without further delay.

The Assam Government and Assam Police, as the case may be, should also take the following measures expeditiously to make the State violence free.

The Chief Minister should immediately appoint a competent Minister as the full-fledged Home Minister of the State as it is, obviously, not possible for him to pay exclusive attention to the duties of the Home Minister.

The State Integration Council should be reorganized and activated to promote in a well planned and sustained manner, good brotherly relations among different ethnic and religious groups in the State.

Any group of people or any individual resorting to land grabbing, whether belonging to government or any private party, and trying to convert anyone to another religion by any means should be strictly dealt with as per law and the relevant laws should be
strengthened as necessary for the purpose, as it is known to everyone that such actions, however small at the beginning, often end in communal flare up subsequently.

A comprehensive survey of sensitive and vulnerable areas from law-and-order point of view in each district should be done urgently and arrangements should be made for maintaining special attention on these areas to prevent/nip any conflict in the bud.

Parking places should not be reduced as is done in Guwahati at present but should in fact be increased and should be manned by adequate number of duly trained Home Guards. Obviously, drivers should be made to pay a reasonable amount as parking fee per hour which should be used to make payment of daily wages to the home guards. The vehicles which are intended to be kept in the parking lots without any occupant in it should be thoroughly searched and their ownership, etc., should be recorded before parking.

Strict action should be taken by police and enforcement staff of motor vehicles department against drivers violating speed limit and using vehicles without number plates and with coloured windows. Speed limits at different portions of roads should be prominently displayed.

Civil Defence and Home Guards Department should be made an integral part of the disaster management machinery of the State and this department should be expanded so that its trained personnel can render required disaster management service in all districts during any natural or man-made calamity.

The Government of India should be pressurized to complete the task of sealing the Indo-Bangladesh border on a war footing to stop infiltration, clandestine movement of extremists and smuggling of weapons and narcotics. The possibility of suicide squads from other countries entering into India to commit recent Mumbai-like massacres should not be ignored.

(The writer is former DGP, Assam)

*(Reproduced from the editorial page of The Assam Tribune dated December 8, 2008)*

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**Terrorised: They Turn to Gandhi**

*Sukhada Tatke* | TNN

**Mumbai:** Film editor Niraj Voralia was in Pune when he heard of the Mumbai attacks. After hours of television time, he began to feel traumatized by the gory images flashing on the screen on repeat. It was then that his eyes fell on his bookshelf, and he knew that comfort of sorts was at hand.
“I instantly picked up Mahatma Gandhi’s autobiography. That seemed like the most calming option. Reading a few pages did calm me and I realized how important he is in the current scenario,” said 42-year-old Voralia.

As a broken Mumbai is trying hard to limp back to life and living, people are looking for a crutch to lean on. Some have taken to angry sloganeering, while others are pinning their hopes on the words and ideals of the Mahatma. The most obvious proof of this is the steady sales of books on Gandhism.

In fact, followers of Gandhi say book sales have been on the rise ever since the Jaipur blasts in May marked the beginning of a chain of blasts in cities across the country. “After every terror attack, the ripple effect is that Gandhi becomes popular. He is read even otherwise, but his words take on a whole new meaning in the wake of terror,” said TRK Somaiya, programme coordinator of Sarvodaya Mandal, where sales of books on and by Gandhi have more than doubled in the last six months. While November 2007 saw a sale of 6,000 books, more than 11,000 were sold in the same period this year. In September and October together, a total of nearly 50,000 books were sold, and in July and August, 22,000 books flew off the shelves. The buyers were individuals, schools, multinational companies and psychiatrists.

According to a psychiatrist at Dadar who has ordered a hundred copies of ‘The Story of My Experiments with Truth,’ the current mood is that of vengeance and deep-rooted anger. “But that is not going to take us far. Changing behaviour is possible when there is utmost emotional arousal. And who else would make a more constructive change than Gandhi himself?” he asked. “As and when violence increases, anxiety and stress increase. Consequently, people turn towards Gandhi’s ideologies as the sole hope to cling to.”

The popularity of Gandhi’s books is boosted by the numerous and skilled translations available. His autobiography (‘The Story of My Experiments with Truth’) is the most widely read. Other popular books in the genre include the writings of his secretary Mahadev Desai, and compilations of Gandhi’s articles, letters and speeches, whose copyright is held by the Navajivan Trust in Gujarat.

This weekend, the Gujarat government organized a blood donation camp at which the book Gandhi Vaani was distributed. “Even though people here were not directly affected, merely watching television has made them fearful and anxious. Now is the time to awaken the Gandhi in each of us,” said Surendra Kathwadia, general secretary of the Gujarat government’s employees union.

Similar sentiments were echoed in the premises of Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) at Chennai. “We found out that the new generation has not grown up on Gandhi. At a time when the human race is threatened by terror, the father of the nation needs to come alive. We are using his books to train young employees,” said Sitaram, training manager of IOC.

Meanwhile, at Mani Bhavan, the Gandhi centre on Laburnum Road, the traffic of foreign visitors has dwindled. “This is peak season but the number of visitors has
dropped by 95 per cent. Foreigners have been badly affected,” said Meghshyam Ajgaonkar, executive secretary of Mani Bhavan.

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* Received by e-mail from [info@mkgandhi.org] on Tuesday, December 16, 2008.