

A FALSE PROPOSITION

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Killing of 24 armed po-lice personnel of Eastern Frontier Rifles at Silda (West Bengal) followed by that of 76 CRPF personnel in Chintalnar (Chattisgarh) occasioned renewed demand for recruiting more police personnel and raising more battalions in India. No less than Union Home Secretary told *Economic Times* (April 19th, 2010) that "our police requirement today is roughly three and half lakhs short....we want to reach the UN average and to get to it I need another five lakh policemen. So we need to recruit eight lakh over next five years..." The UN, it is claimed, recommends 222 police personnel for every 100,000. In India it is said the average is 125 per 100,000.(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 poor police to people ratio, such as Bihar has 60 police personnel for 100,000 and this becomes even less if one disaggregates urban from rural. Thus against a sanctioned strength of 52 for all police stations in the country some of them it is as low as 12 as in MP and 13 in Orissa and 89 in UP. While this would tend to justify the demand for more police personnel, there is need for abundant caution.

For one, when 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 para-military force meant to use force to end a riot or subdue a murderous gang. The difference between armed and civilian police is significant, in terms of their training and mandate.(2) Although armed police is used for quelling riotous situation, these are for short period deployment under magisterial supervision and are significantly unlike prolonged use to suppress insurgencies. Yet, when the demand is voiced for more troops it is not clearly spelled out that while UN speaks of civil police- people ratio in India it is transformed to justify augmenting the strength of the para-military forces. Secondly, when average of 125 for every 100,000 is spoken of in India what is forgotten is that in areas where government is carrying out military suppression there is very heavy deployment of forces and the average is heavily skewed in favour of armed forces vis a vis the people.

Take 34 districts spread over seven states (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Orissa, and West Bengal) being singled out for operations against 'Left Wing Extremists', have a deployment of 75 battalions of central para military formations, along with equal number of state armed police battalions. In addition there is India Reserve Battalions, Special Police Officers (Chattisgarh has 4500 of them who get on an average Rs 3500 per month) as well as Home Guards, Village Defence Committees (under various names such as *Salwa Judum*, *Sendra*, *Shanti Sena*...). Each police station in these districts has on an average 100-250 personnel, that is two to five times of sanctioned strength. These are supplemented by armed force camp every 5-10 km with 15-200 personnel. District head quarters have up to 500 personnel.

Thus in these 34 districts the ratio of armed police to population ratio is much too high and conservatively it cannot be no less than 1:75 people. These forces, are paid well

especially after 6th Pay award, and contrary to conventional wisdom, are equipped with light machine guns, grenade launchers, mortars, hand grenades, automatic grenade launchers, SLRs, AK 47s, INSAS, Sten Machine carbines, 9 mm pistols.... Thus the lament of MHA that 75-80 per cent of its budget allocation goes towards meeting salaries leaving little for training and weapons is only a half truth. Moreover, with accretion in strength of military personnel also rises the wages, salaries and pension bill. Pension bill itself has gone up quite significantly, for instance defence and paramilitary forces pension outgo is estimated to be no less than Rs 35,000 cr for 2010-2011!

The point is that a massive augmentation of military force is underway this time in the name of fighting LWE. Union Home Secretary says that last year, ie 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 NE then, forces (regiments and battalions) raised using those conflicts as an excuse, what happens to them? Or is it that every real and imagined conflict is but an excuse to further raise the strength of force to augment the fighting arm of the State rather than courage and imagination to pursue democratic resolution to a plethora of problem? And one may add, to even ponder the sheer wastefulness of employment generation in a sector which is nonproductive?

Thus fundamental flaw lies in hyping internal security which enjoys such premium that no one bothers to interrogate any longer its rationale or the premise behind them. In other words it is not lack of force on the ground, for there is far too much for any sensible person to want more for the 34 districts. It is rather lack of will to address fundamental issues of land grab, displacement, privatisation of forest and water resources of adivasis and enable corporate takeover of land, water and forests that need addressing in so far as war against the Maoists is concerned.

1. I tried to track down the source for this so called UN recommendation. I approached Ramesh Chandar in UNInformation 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 100,000 population worldwide for 2006...." Even more surprising is another fact sheet in the press kit from South African Institute of Race Relations whose title speaks for itself, namely, "Safest Province has the least police to population ratio-24th April 2008"!
2. E N Rammohan, former DGP of BSF and tasked to inquire into April 6th killing of CRPF jawans at Chintalnar (Chattisgarh) told *Times of India* (May 2 ,2010) in an interview that "(a) person from the central para military force is half soldier. He is trained to attack, shoot and kill. An 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..."