**Are Criminals In Charge of Law and Order in Dakshina Kannada District?**

The developments witnessed in Dakshina Kannada district over the past few days have exposed who actually controls the law and order situation in the district. When the deputy commissioner (DC) warns miscreants not to take law into their hands, the DC not only receives open threats to life but also gets transferred within two days of having issued the warning. Peoples’ representatives who are supposed to extend support to the DC, assigned with the responsibility of maintaining the law and order in the district, choose to not react, thereby extending their silent support to the anti-social elements. These developments have raised several significant questions and triggered anxiety among the people of the district whether the Sangha Parivar is a sub-branch of the police department.

Dakshina Kannada DC Sindhu B. Rupesh had recently convened a high-level meeting of district officials. The main objective of convening the meeting was to ensure that law and order is maintained in the district. Any untoward incident or unrest in the district could leave an impact on the people of the district already battered by the Coronavirus, lockdown, and other developments. In this context, the meeting assumed significance. After the meeting, the DC issued two main orders. One order was against those indulging in ‘illegal, unlawful cattle transport’. ‘In view of Bakrid, slaughterhouse operations should not be run illegally. Stringent action would be taken against those indulging in illegal transport of cows and the killing of cows,’ was the gist of the order. The other order was against ‘fake cow protectors.’ ‘It is an offence to stop, indulge in brawls, and assault the transportation of cattle. If illegal activities are noticed, police should be informed immediately. Instead, if anyone takes law into their hands, stringent action would be taken against them,’ the order warned. The moment the second order was issued, miscreants of the Sangh Parivar vented their ire on social media. They not only criticized the DC but also started hurling several allegations against her and went to the extent of issuing her a life threat. . Though the police filed a suo moto case and arrested the accused, the question is not against the threats to the DC per se but rather about who is responsible for the growth of such miscreants of the Sangh Parivar who openly issue such life threats against the senior-most officer of the district administration for simply asking the people follow the law.

There is no doubt that ‘fake cow protectors’ are extortionists operating in the garb of cow-protectors. These vigilantes have neither reared cows nor hold any sort of an emotional connect with them. This ‘fake cow protection’ is, in fact, proving to be a headache for those who eke out a living rearing cows and selling milk, and is not helping anyone. Many of them face several serious allegations of stopping poor farmers from selling their cattle, threatening and capturing the cattle, and selling them secretly to slaughterhouses and minting money on the pretext of sending them into cattle protection centres. At the same time, they indulge in threatening and seizing cash and mobile from the hapless cattle transporters. Criminal cases are registered against many of them. Rejected by society as goondas in the past, they are now wearing the fancy dress of ‘cow protectors’ and trying to gain credibility and social acceptance. If the police try to take action against them, they take shelter under religion, culture, and different masks they wear. They are also the [foot-soldiers](https://www.dellemc.com/resources/en-us/auth/asset/soi/service-brief/sc6001-sc7000/sc6474-sb.docx?web=1) of a political party and have therefore become a huge challenge in the maintenance of law and order. Emboldened by the backing of political leaders, they have not grown to the extent of sending threatening messages through social media to the DC. The DC is not the only one who is responsible for ensuring that miscreants don’t hijack the law and order situation in a district. People’s representatives who have won popular votes are also equally responsible. When the DC tried to protect the law and order and received life threats, the peoples’ representatives should have immediately responded and stood in support of the DC. But through their silence, these representatives indirectly supported the extremists. Ironically, the DC was transferred within two days after the orders were issued. People are now suspecting that the DC’s commitment to work is perhaps responsible for the unexpected transfer. Does it then mean that political leaders are of the view that law and order need not be maintained in the district? Or does it mean that the responsibility of maintaining law and order has been handed over to these miscreants who are facing criminal charges?

As though to corroborate this, an incident occurred recently in Belthangady taluk. A meeting of police officers convened by Belthangady MLA about preventing cattle lifting and illegal transport of cattle was attended by Sangh Parivar leaders. What was the need for the presence of ‘fake cow protectors’ of Sangha Parivar in the meeting of police officials convened to stop illegal cow transportation? Many of the Sangha Parivar leaders who attended the meeting are facing criminal cases. By inviting them to the meeting and sitting alongside them, the legislator has not only dented the image of the law enforcement agencies but also brought down the morale of the police. If those who are supposed to be in prison sit alongside the police in an official meeting called by the legislator, what is the message that the legislator is sending across? It is similar to giving wolves the role of protecting sheep. These developments expose the way in which the miscreants of Sangh Parivar have an unlawful nexus with the police department in the district. How can we then expect law and order and peace to prevail in Dakshina Kannada? And how can a new DC be expected to act boldly in matters of law and order in the district?

EOM/Anupama