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30% shortage in the number of overall armed policemen

BENGALURU: Vacancies High in Armed Police, Counter-terrorism
The police department is being blamed for the protests getting out of hand earlier this week.

However, data of the Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D) for 20042015 shows that Karnataka has failed to equip police with adequate manpower. There is a severe shortage, ranging between 30% and 70%, in all categories.

Hours before the CM wanted police to ensure the situation on Monday does not go out of control, Bengaluru city commissioner NS Megharikh had informed his office that the shortage would affect policing in case of protests.

Reacting to this, home minister G Parameshwara, however, said: "There was no shortage of police personnel on the day of the violence. We had deployed 16,000 personnel besides 10 companies from other states. The situation went out of control in certain areas because bylanes were blocked by burning vehicles and tyres, preventing personnel from entering the area."

In Bengaluru, which has 147 police stations, of the 14,754 police personnel, only 4,375 are armed. The overall sanctioned strength in Karnataka is 1.07 lakh, while on the ground it's 73,746, only one policeman for 830 people. The overall shortage in the state is 31%.

If all vacancies had been filled, there would have been one policeman for 572 people. Since 2015, the department, according to its website has added 4,300 personnel, but this doesn't meet the shortfall.

When compared to four other states with metros -Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata -Karnataka fares badly. In Maharashtra, the overall shortage is only 7%, while in Delhi, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal it is 6%, 17% and 41% respectively.

Retired DG&IGP ST Ramesh said: "We always speak of vacancies, which are an eternal problem. But the state and experts forget that the sanctioned number itself is woefully low."

In Karnataka, there is also a 30% shortage in the number of overall armed policemen with only 8,837 of the sanctioned 12,575 posts filled. In case of police meant to deal with insurgents, extremists, terrorists and organised criminal gangs, there is a 48% shortage. In this category, the sanctioned strength of the sub-inspectors is 97, but only five are deputed.

Regarding posts dealing with intelligence, there is a 34% shortage. While top posts are filled, the shortage is largely of those expected to carry out duties on the ground. There is a 82% shortage in SI posts with just 41 of 224 posts filled. There is also a shortage in the constabulary .

Parameshwara said: "Don't go by data you have. The state has been hiring policemen on a regular basis. While there was a shortage of 25,000 constables, we've hired 16,000 of whom 8,000 are undergoing training." He added that another 237 SIs will soon be inducted.

Parameshwara conceded there's a need to augment training infrastructure as insufficient facilities are delaying deployment of personnel after recruitment.

A senior officer pointed out that recruitment is a long process. "From the time of issuing an advertisement to finally giving the appointment letter, it takes about nine months." Ramesh added that the Police Recruitment Branch lacks the infrastructure to do simultaneous recruitment. "They can recruit only one cadre at a time. They do not have the infrastructure to do simultaneous recruitments, which creates a huge backlog as each recruitment cycle takes nine to 10 months."

Reiterating that the state must increase the sanctioned strength, he said: "Every year we must add at least 2,000 more people to cope with the growing population and changing dynamics of crime. The police is in focus almost every day, but nobody understand how the shortage issue can hurt them."

From controlling the fracas that erupted over the Mahadayi dispute, to maintaining peace during the strike called by trade unions and finally, holding the state together over the past two days, Karnataka police has had a lot on its plate. While there is no escaping the fact that the law and order situation in the city got out of hand on Monday, for the state government to shift the blame almost entirely on the police is unfair. The force is faced with a crippling staff shortage, and augmenting it should be the chief concern of the government.