

Strengthening Coastal Security through Cooperative Federalism

Author: Himadri Das*

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Tomorrow, 26 November 2016, the nation will observe the eight anniversary of the '26/11' Mumbai terrorist attacks. Precisely two months back on 26 September 2016, the *Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)* tabled its 2015 report on the General and Social Sector (Government of Odisha) in the State Assembly. The report highlighted that the objective of securing the coastline of the State through establishment of the Marine Police Stations and that sea patrolling was not achieved, despite the financial assistance from the Government of India under the Coastal Security Scheme (CSS).

The 2001 report of the Group of Ministers (GoM), constituted after the 1999 Kargil Conflict, had recommended setting-up of a specialised marine police in all coastal States and island territories, operating from Coastal Police Stations (CPS). The police force was to be appropriately trained and equipped for the maritime role. The GoM had also recommended the creation of Department of Border Management in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Subsequently, in January 2004, the Department of Border Management was created at MHA. The first phase of the CSS was launched in 2005 to strengthen coastal policing. Following the '26/11' incident, Phase II was implemented in April 2011. With a total financial outlay of Rs 2225.91 crore for all the 13 coastal States/ Union Territories (UTs), the two phases include setting-up of 204 Coastal Police Stations (CPS), 97 checkpoints, 58 outposts, 30 barracks, 60 jetties, 10 Operations Centres and procurement of 431 boats. For monitoring its implementation, a Steering Committee for Review of Coastal Security (SCRCS) has been set-up at MHA under the chairpersonship of Secretary (Border Management).

Post the '26/11' incident, the Indian Navy was designated as the agency responsible for 'overall maritime security' including coastal and offshore security, and the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) was given responsibility for 'coastal security in territorial waters including areas to be patrolled by the Coastal Police'. The Coastal Police is presently responsible for close-coast patrolling.

The Indian Maritime Security Strategy (2015), has envisaged an increasing role and operational responsibilities to be taken up by the ICG and other agencies (like the Coastal Police), in tandem with growth in their capabilities.

In February 2014, the 177th Report of the Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs on CSS had highlighted several issues relating to its implementation across all coastal States/ UTs. The CAG, in its report, based on test check of records of concerned offices and physical inspection of assets created, has highlighted *inter alia* the following:-

- Cumulatively, there was a significant shortfall in patrolling effort (almost 97 per cent), especially at night.
- Checks on fishing vessels were not being undertaken by the Coastal Police.
- There was an acute shortage of manpower; 'persons in position', in sample Police Stations, was 25.33 per cent of the sanction. Also, police personnel were not adequately trained for marine policing.
- There were delays in land acquisition, and support infrastructure, such as barracks and staff quarters, were yet to be constructed at several locations.
- Jetties under CSS were yet to be constructed and the Coastal Police were using fisheries jetties, some located more than 70 kilometres from the CPS.
- Only 31.07 per cent of total funds received under CSS Phase II, for establishing basic infrastructure, have been utilised.
- Lack of inspections of CPS and state-level monitoring mechanisms.

The Coastal Police, envisaged in 2000-01, is one of the integral and key constituents of the coastal security construct in India. However, as both reports indicate, despite the continuing efforts of central and state governments, there still remain significant challenges to the implementation of CSS, and thus the effectiveness of the Coastal Police itself. Considering the tenuous security environment in the immediate neighbourhood and global trends indicative of increasing capabilities (and threats) from terrorists, the lacunae highlighted in the report would need to be addressed.

On 16 June 2016, a coastal security meeting was held at Mumbai chaired by the Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh, and attended by the home ministers, chief secretaries and DGPs of all coastal States and UTs. During the meeting, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri Devendra Fadnavis, suggested that since marine policing was a 'specialised job', a Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) may be raised for patrolling coastal waters and other related duties. The proposal was supported by some other coastal States/ Union Territories, and the Union Home Minister agreed to examine it. The February 2014 report on the CSS had also recommended the raising of a Marine India Reserve Battalion (MIRB).

In July 2016, the 11th meeting of the Inter-State Council (ISC) was held in New Delhi after a gap of over ten years. The meeting, perhaps for the first time, discussed issues related to internal security, intelligence-sharing among the States and central agencies, police modernisation and terrorism. During the meeting, the Union Home Minister emphasised the importance of 'cooperative federalism' and the commitment of the Government to 'ideal Centre-State cooperation'.

Meetings of the Eastern Zonal Council (27 June 2016), Western Zonal Council (21 October 2016) and the Standing Committee of the Southern Zonal Council (14 October 2016) also discussed issues related to fisheries, coastal security, terrorism and police modernisation. Furthermore, the SCRCs has been strengthened, and institutional mechanisms for coastal security coordination have also been implemented at the State and district levels.

Issues related to coastal security - such as shipping, fishing, ports, police, international maritime borders - transcend the Union, State and Concurrent lists necessitating close coordination between the Union and State Governments, as well as a large number of stakeholders. Hopefully, the recent initiatives to leverage the existing institutional mechanisms for 'cooperative federalism' to strengthen security mechanisms will provide complementary avenues for discussions, deliberations and action.

**Himadri Das is a serving officer in the Indian Navy. The views expressed are his own and do not reflect the official policy or the Indian Navy, the NMF or the Government of India. He can be reached at himadridas@rediffmail.com*