

Facilitating Better Community Relations*

The communal tensions in various parts of the country can be addressed by creating new and innovative administrative mechanisms. The aim of such administrative mechanisms should be to initiate positive moves for better management of community relations at the local level as an antidote to manipulation by outside forces for political purposes. A model of such administrative mechanism has been enumerated below:

- First, urban centres and other areas prone to communal tensions may be identified on the basis of the past data and Community Relations Officers (CRO) will be appointed to make a detailed study of the communities concerned, so as to determine the flash points and the likely correctives.
- This arrangement should cover not only the major concerns, viz., Hindu-Muslim tensions but also sectarian conflicts like Shia-Sunni and linguistic or regional disharmonies, although resources, human and financial, may confine the initial effort to the major concerns.
- Scholars such as Prof. Ashutosh Varshney have pointed out that in cities where Hindus and Muslims participated in formal associations of civil society for their common professional and economic transactions, such cities have been able to prevent the underlying communal tensions from escalating into unacceptable communal violence. Therefore it is worthwhile encouraging associational interactions across communities with appropriate policies and programmes. The CRO will have a crucial role in this exercise.
- CRO will work closely with local administration and will activate the Mohalla Committees, inter-religious groups and other such bodies that are now generally invoked by the administration only after eruption of violence.
- CRO will also be given the authority to redress grievances which may result in communal violence. The CRO has to be insulated against the pressures of local and state politics.

* This note is based largely on the inputs provided by Sri M Ramakrishnayya IAS (Retd.), former Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

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- A Community Relations Commission (CRC) may be constituted at the national level under a special Act of Parliament. It may be patterned after NHRC as a quasi-judicial body with additional powers to enforce its decision on the disputes that come before it. It may have an Advisory Council consisting of representatives of different communities, important religious leaders, members of parliament, Chief Ministers of concerned states and the concerned Central Ministries. It may have power to constitute Dispute Settlement Bodies in suitable cases. The CROs will be the officers of the Commission and work under its control.
- As in most cases of communal violence, hard evidence is not forthcoming. Hence, it is necessary to levy collective fines which may act as disincentive for fractious leaders of communities against adopting unacceptable violent methods. This penal provision could be a part of the central legislation.

The NAC may consider such a proposal for legislation and appointment of independent CRO's in notified areas. Suitable recommendation may be sent.