

The Khaki Confusion on the Roads of National Capital

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By Sidharth Mishra



In the Kingsway Camp area of North Delhi, there is a small market known as Edward Lines. This market essentially served in the older times the Delhi Police Lines which exists next to it, rather the market is on the periphery of the huge Police Line Campus. Over the past few years, it has seen some change but a set of shops have remained rooted in good old times.

These are four or five shops of tailors and drapers, who specialise in stitching khaki uniforms worn by the Delhi Police personnel. They have varieties of Khaki fabric to suit every pocket from a constable to the Indian Police Service (IPS) officials.

For the past few months these shops are witnessing a boom in their business, as the Arvind Kejriwal Government has let loose on the streets of Delhi khaki wearing civil defence volunteers, whose uniform differs with that of Delhi Police only in the colour of the beret, which is similar to worn by the Indian Army commandos.

Delhi Government's justification in deploying them is ostensibly to prosecute those who are not following Covid measures. Now prosecution and persecution are similar sounding words. Whether they have powers of prosecution or not, many may have doubts. There, however, is unanimity of them persecuting citizens belligerently acting beyond their brief. A recent image of a khaki wearing volunteer beating a student with his uniform belt reminded one of the titles of very popular pulp fiction novel, 'Vardiwala Gunda' (a criminal in uniform).

In addition to those manufacturing masks, sanitisers and other medical essentials, the pandemic has opened up the opportunity for these civil defence volunteers too, with claims of extortion piling up against them. They could be seen on the roads laying in wait for their preys, particularly those who appear less-groomed, who often take them to be police personnel.

Several people have complained that these volunteers often assume the role of traffic police and stop even those who might be wearing a mask but not the helmet or who haven't fastened their seat belt. The possibility of them acting as moral police (akin to Romeo Squads of

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neighbouring Uttar Pradesh) too cannot be ruled out with Kejriwal promising a 'Ram Rajya' in the city.

To add to this whole drama of absurd, which the city could have avoided in the grim Covid times, is the helplessness of Delhi Police to control a new form of lawlessness on the city roads. These volunteers extort money by threatening people with a jail term in case they fail to pay the fine, with the real policemen standing by as mute spectators.

Delhi Police Commissioner SN Shrivastava actually cut a sorry figure stating that these volunteers should not be allowed to use the Delhi Police barricades to stop the vehicles. He has asked his district police chiefs to ensure that people do not confuse civil defence volunteers with police personnel and a clear distinction can be made between them. How would that happen, Mr Commissioner?

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who started of his career as head of the government by sitting on a historic dharna at the Rail Bhawan to protest against the police atrocities, has now come a long way in initiating to make Delhi a 'police state'. What's audacious about the move is the fact that the Delhi Police, the legal arm of prosecution, is with the central government as are the subject of law and order.

Civil defence volunteers may have a role in assisting administration in times of natural or man-made calamities but certainly a role of a law-maintaining authority has not been authorised for them under any rule book. Why is the Centre and the Lieutenant Governor looking the other way? Only they can explain.

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