

Journey of transformation: How the battle for police commissionerate system in UP was fought & won

OP Singh

The air in Lucknow on that December afternoon in 2019 was unusually heavy — not just with the winter chill, but with the palpable scent of an impending storm.

A crowd of over 500 people had seized a vital traffic junction near Hazratganj. An indefinite protest (against the Citizenship



Amendment Act) on the lines of Delhi's Shaheen Bagh had reached the heart of Uttar Pradesh.

FIRST PERSON

For a police officer with barely two months left to hang the boots, this was more than a law-and-order crisis.

It was the test of a vision that I had carried since the day I took over as the chief of Uttar Pradesh Police. I told Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, "I am going there myself. We will not let this spiral."

As I donned my bullet-proof vest and gripped my baton, leading my team into the melee of stones and slogans at the Hazratganj roundabout, my mind flashed back to the months of quiet preparation that the world knew nothing about. While the public saw the routine workings



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of the state, a radical transformation was being whispered into existence behind closed doors.

For months, the Chief Minister and I had engaged in a series of late-night meetings. These

were private, intense dialogues between two people working for the safety of 24 crore people of the state. In the quiet of his residence, long after the hustle of the day had faded, I would explain to the CM the intricacies of our 19th-century policing system and show him how the commissionerate system — a discarded dream since 1978 — could become the backbone of a modern, industrial state.

The discussions revealed Yogi Adityanath's fierce passion for radical governance. He listened, he questioned, and he kept our counsel.

The chaos at Hazratganj roundabout was the final proof we needed. After the site was

cleared and normalcy was restored, I realized that the "dual command" system was a relic. We were fighting 21st-century urban challenges with administrative red tape. Days later, when I met the CM to debrief him on the protests, I told him that had the commissionerate system been in operation, the agitation could have been contained far more effectively and swiftly.

"I will give your proposal a serious thought. How soon can we get the paperwork done?" the CM said. These words were the most beautiful music I had heard in my entire career.

I roped in a team of brilliant officers — one of them now a state minister. Drafts from states

like Telangana and Maharashtra were used to tailor a model that suited the complex, high-stakes state of Uttar Pradesh. Expected bureaucratic resistance followed which was fought back successfully. The CM took upon the task of going through every minute detail of the hierarchy. On Jan 13, 2020, the silence of late-night meetings was replaced by the roar of headlines.

The commissionerate system was officially announced for Lucknow and Noida. The news sent a wave of euphoria through the police fraternity. Legends like Prakash Singh hailed it as a "bold step". For me, it was the perfect parting gift. I was on cloud nine, but I reminded my officers that it was a challenge, not a reward.

Today, as we sense an achievement over police improvement in the state, I look back at that nagging void I felt as my retirement approached. It is gone.

In its place is a thriving, professional system that stands as a testament to what can happen when intent meets courage. We didn't just change the rules of policing that winter; we kept a promise to the future of Uttar Pradesh. The boots may be hung, but the legacy of those silent, midnight conversations lives on in every safe street and every protected citizen.

(Writer is former DGP of UP and is also President & CEO of Indian Police Foundation)