

Dalit Day to bring cops, community closer

By Umesh Yadav, ET Bureau | Dec 21, 2015, 11.21 AM IST

BENGALURU: In a first, the police department will observe every second Sunday as Dalit day across all 105 police stations in Bengaluru. The decision comes less than two months after G Parameshwara, a Dalit, took charge as home minister. In a two-page circular, Karnataka police chief Om Prakash has asked station house officers (SHOs) to conduct meetings every second Sunday by involving local Dalit leaders and hear their grievances. This comes in the backdrop of allegations by pro-Dalit organisations that the police have turned a blind eye towards complaints of atrocities against those belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes. The circular also states that SHOs should send a detailed report to deputy commissioners on what was discussed in each meeting and their plan of action. Outside Bengaluru, inspectors are to submit reports to district police superintendents. In turn, the DCPs and SPs are to formulate suitable action after discussions with seniors from their jurisdictional commissionerates.

It is now mandatory, according to the circular, for senior officers to personally examine cases of SCST atrocities and guide SHOs on the investigation.

Parameshwara, who belongs to a scheduled caste, commands significant support from Dalit communities. In fact, some Dalit organisations even launched a campaign to install him as a deputy chief minister, following it up with a call to have him serve as Karnataka's first dalit chief minister. The Dalit day decision is also in line with chief minister Siddaramaiah's Ahinda approach. Ahinda is a Kannada acronym that stands for minorities, backward classes and dalits.

Originally, every last Sunday of a month was to be observed as the Dalit day requiring SHOs to visit Dalit colonies and hear grievances. This was not followed. In his circular, Om Prakash expects SHOs to send him a report every month on Dalit day meetings and the steps they have taken to address their grievances. Failing this, officers will face strict action, the police chief warned.

Siddalingaiah, an award-winning writer and a founding member of the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, welcomed the move. "The number of cases against dalits is increasing but a few result in punishment due to lack of evidence. For example, seven dalits were burnt alive in their house in the Kambalapalli village of Kolar. All the accused were let go for want of evidence," he pointed out. The writer also added: "The police must be aware that the Dalit day should narrow the social gap and not widen it."