

Security: Status Symbol or Protection: RSTV – Big Picture

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Context:

- The Special Protection Group (SPG) cover given to Sonia Gandhi, her son Rahul Gandhi, daughter Priyanka Gandhi and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was replaced with the 'Z-plus' security of the Central Reserve Police Force.
- The decision on the change in security cover was taken by the Home Ministry.

The Objective of the SPG Act, 1985:

- - The SPG Act was introduced in the wake of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1985.
 - Birbal Nath Committee recommended the setting up of a Special Protection Unit (SPU) to provide protection to the Prime Ministers.
 - The law initially did not include protection to the former prime ministers and thus the protection was withdrawn when Rajiv Gandhi stepped down as the Prime Minister.
 - The Parliament passed the SPG Act in 1988:
 - Following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991, the Act was amended to offer protection to all former PMs and their families for at least 10 years.
- **“An Act to provide for the constitution and regulation of an armed force of the Union for providing proximate security to the Prime Minister of India and former Prime Ministers of India and members of their immediate families and for matters connected therewith.”**
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- The Act was amended again in 2003 to bring the period of automatic protection from 10 years to “a period of one year from the date on which the former prime minister ceased to hold office” and thereafter based on the level of threat as decided by the government.

How is the threat perception decided?

- The Home Ministry takes the decision based on inputs from intelligence agencies, which include the Intelligence Bureau and the Research and Analysis Wing.
- They largely give a subjective measure of threat to life or injury to a person from terrorists or any other group, based on information from their sources.
- The threats recorded from various sources such as local intelligence and many other similar sources

are consolidated by the Union Home Secretary.

- Hence the inputs from all sources are incorporated, assessed and the decision is made in a very precise and transparent manner based on the logical need and the threat faced by the individual.

The difference between SPG, Z, and Z+ category of protection level

- There are 6 levels of protection- X, Y, Y+, Z, Z+, and SPG.
 - The **X** category entails one gunman for the protection of the individual.
 - The **Y** category allows for two police personnel, one for mobile and one for static plus four for rotation.
 - The **Z** category allows for six gunmen for mobile security and two for residence security, while eight are for rotation purposes.
 - The **Z+** category entitles 10 personnel for mobile security and two for residence security while eight are for rotation purposes.
 - There are around 3000 personnel active in the SPG.

Recruitment and Armory

- - The commandos and personnel with CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) and NSG (National Security Guard) go on deputations to make up the SPG.
 - There are a few minor differences in weaponry and scale of ammunition between each category including slight variations in the armor and bulletproof jacketing of SPG.
 - The equipment, training, and manpower are the same in all the categories.
 - The same manpower which forms a part of Z+ may also form a part of the SPG.
 - The responsibility of the protection of a particular individual will fall equally on the individual and the agency protecting the individual.
 - The difference between the various levels of protection differs only in terms of optics.
- “The use of the word optics characterizes a situation in which a person or organization worries about the public perception of a decision more than the substance of the decision itself.”

What is different about SPG:

- **Model of Unit:** In the initial period of its creation, the model was based on the secret services associated with the president of the USA.
- **Training programs:** were adopted from the FBI. The weapons, armors, ammunition and interpersonal communication devices are of the highest order and constitute state-of-the-art equipment.
- **SOP:** The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of SPG is very different from the activity of any other force.
- **Status Symbol:** The SPG security protocol makes the person seem very distinct. It has now become a status symbol.
- However, there are hardly any differences or only a few marginal differences in the capabilities of personnel in the SPG and Z+ as both covers are equally proficient in providing security.

SPG Functioning:

- The SPG is in close coordination with the other concerned agencies and follows a mechanism to pass on the intelligence input in the fastest possible way while keeping the nodal offices in the loop.
- The coordination may be hourly, or daily depending on the gravity of the threat.
- Z+ level of protection allows up to 55 personnel for the protection of one individual.
- The SPG is trained to offer layers of protection and the inner layers are infallible and invincible.
 - SOP of the SPG is honed to perfection.
 - The threat perception has reduced significantly over the years.
- The SPG is at par with the best in the field and they're based in the Prime Minister's Office.

Challenges

- The frivolous allotment of security causes a huge drain on the resources of the state. It has to be kept in mind that this is at the cost of public security and public welfare.
- Security allotment has to be made realistic. The allotment has to be on the basis of actual need and requirement instead of on the whimsical imagination and ambition of a person.

Conclusion:

- It is the job of the state to analyze and give protection to a person who needs it, as security is a matter of utmost importance.
- We have to move towards a more politically mature system of allotment of security for an individual instead of setting it as a parameter for social status.
- SPG is a distinctive force that is made for a specialized role and shouldn't deviate from that.