



September 2025

EMPOWERING TIMES



THINKING ALOUD

Law ... But No Order
Jay

PODIUM

D. Sivanandhan
Former Police
Commissioner of Mumbai



WE RECOMMEND

Eliminating Crime with
Courage & Innovation:
A Leader Recounts

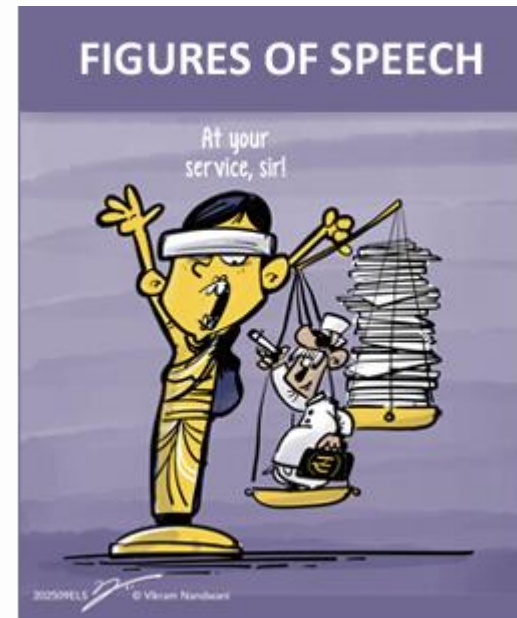
Dear Reader,

In uncertain times, leadership is tested in ways that go far beyond strategy and profit. Decisions are no longer just about business outcomes - they shape trust, social order, and the resilience of communities. The delicate balance between law, ethics, and governance becomes increasingly apparent as societies face political, economic, and social turbulence.

This month, **Empowering Times (ET)** explores the theme '*Leading in Uncertain Times: A Veteran's Thoughts*' - examining how leaders navigate complexity with courage, integrity, and foresight.

In the **Thinking Aloud** section, **Jay** reflects on the paradox of living in a country with 'more law...but order be damned,' highlighting the challenges of governance, justice, and social responsibility in a densely legislated yet often under-governed environment. On the **Podium**, we feature insights from **D. Sivanandhan**, former Mumbai Police Commissioner, whose new book [The Brahmastra Unleashed](#) offers a first-hand account of tackling organized crime, corruption, and systemic challenges. His experiences underscore how leadership in uncertain times demands courage, decisiveness, empathy, and a commitment to ethical action - even under extreme pressure. In the **We Recommend** section, Jay reviews **The Brahmastra Unleashed**, a compelling narrative that goes beyond popular fiction to reveal the realities of policing, strategy, and reform in India's commercial capital. The book demonstrates that visionary leadership, backed by discipline and foresight, can restore order and create lasting impact.

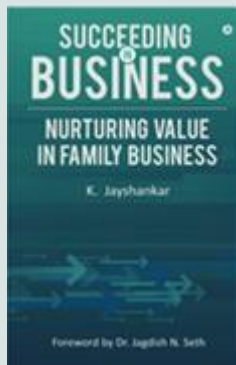
In **Figures of Speech**, **Vikram's** toons show that in uncertain times, even justice feels the pressure!



Please also [Click Here](#) to check out our Special issue of ET, which is a collation of selected themes that were featured over the years highlighting the changing landscape of the business world. This special edition has been well received and can be [Downloaded Here](#) for easy reading and is a collector's item.

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THINKING ALOUD

Law ... But No Order

Jay

Martin Luther King famously said that 'Law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and when they fail in this purpose, they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress'. His words ring out loud when you see the situation in India and find that we are engulfed in a sea of laws... but still cry out for justice.

At the fundamental level, Law refers to a set of rules that have been created through society's accepted governance mechanism, be it the institution called parliament, or other such executive authority that controls the nation's administrative operations and management. These rules - be it through legislative dictums, judicial pronouncements or executive fiats - regulate behavior of citizens, specify conditions for business engagements, define settlement of disputes, and such other procedural matters that are meant to ensure governance and order in the society to benefit the populace under their jurisdiction by endowing the public with entitlements called citizen's rights. It is an accepted belief that the absence of such general consensus for social transactions paves the way for anarchy and chaos as might dictates winners - not necessarily the genuine ownership of a property or application of social or moral standards. Good governance, therefore, has always emphasized probity over naked power and protected the vulnerable from the bullying usurper - a necessary condition for law and consequent order.

With a statute book of over 1200 Central laws, and along with a multitude of State and local laws (arguably perhaps the largest in the world), one would assume that our nation provides more than enough protection to ensure the well-being of our citizens. The truth, however, is totally the contrary. The argumentative and cantankerous Indian

is a master of sophism and has honed his ability supremely to exploit the rule book in every way, and succeeded in his desire to obfuscate the judicial process. Judicial sclerosis is total: at last count we have nearly 54 million cases pending in Indian courts - about 87K in the Supreme Court; more than 6.36 million in the High Courts; and over 47 million in the District and Subordinate courts. Be it Civil, Criminal, or Commercial, it is well understood that the judicial process is akin to slow poison. Measured by Gladstone's words that 'Justice delayed is justice denied', there is little or no scope for those who commence litigation in the hope for early justice. Take the case of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, under which cases must be settled within 1 year as per Section 35. The reality as per a 2023 study: the average time taken is 1 year and 5 months (about 509 days), and in the case of courts in Delhi, given the backlog, clearing the pendency could take up to 27 years.

Let me present one more dimension to the challenge of governance. A recent report of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) highlights that 45% of members of Legislative Assemblies (MLAs) across India have criminal cases against them, and 29% have serious charges (such as murder, crimes against women, kidnapping, etc.). This malaise extends beyond party lines, and no political party is exempt as the quest for power is a uniform drive. Arguments are often made that cases are politically motivated and that those accused are innocent - but there is no denying that without the company of individuals with such colorful backgrounds, it is believed that elections cannot be won. Hence, no party would ostracize these individuals and come election time, deals are struck to withdraw cases in return for favors. The ultimate casualty: rule of law.

The impunity with which agitators break the law during a stir is galling to the tax paying public. However just the cause which compels a political or social confrontation, it is inexcusable that public property is vandalized, and blatant criminal activities are let loose (looting, arson, violence in different forms, etc.) in the name of democratic protests. The miscreants know that they will be shielded by their political masters, as all cases are withdrawn once the government caves in to the demands. There is no recourse or remedy to individuals, businesses, institutions, and all those affected by the turmoil during which legal provisions are given short shrift. This cycle has been repeated ad nauseam for decades. Law enforcers and the public alike are full of ennui when they hear the preachy declarations from the politician of the day stridently claiming to uphold the law, or even when a new Chief Justice commits himself to clear the backlog of judicial files when his tenure itself lasts a few months, if not weeks. Such

bravado crumbles in the face of the first salvo of resistance to a new and radical proposal for modernization as the status quoists mount steep challenges.

The outcome in a land which is over-legislated and under-governed: more law... order be damned.

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Podium

D. Sivanandhan

Former Police Commissioner of Mumbai



Mr. D. Sivanandhan is one of India's most respected IPS officers, with over 35 years of distinguished service. A postgraduate in Economics from the University of Madras, he has served in senior roles across the Intelligence Bureau, CBI, and Mumbai Crime Branch, and as Commissioner of Police for Nagpur, Thane, and Mumbai. He retired as Director General of Police, Maharashtra, in 2011.

Renowned for his uncompromising fight against corruption and organised crime, Mr. Sivanandhan is widely recognised for his strategic and intelligence-driven policing. His contributions earned him the President's Distinguished Service Medal (2000), Meritorious Service Medal (1993), and Internal Security Medal (1998). In

2011–12, he was part of the National Security Council Secretariat (PMO) task force to strengthen India's internal and external security.

Post-retirement, he served as Security Advisor to the Reserve Bank of India (2012–15) and sits on the boards of several leading companies. He is Chairman of Securus First India Pvt. Ltd., a security consultancy founded by him.

Beyond policing, he founded Roti Bank Mumbai, an NGO that has served over 23 million meals to the underprivileged, and co-authored the national bestsellers Chanakya's Seven Secrets of Leadership and [The Brahmastra Unleashed](#) - The First-Person Account of How the Mumbai Mafia Was Annihilated.

ET: In your book, The Brahmastra Unleashed, you recount Mumbai's battle against the underworld. What does that experience reveal about the qualities leaders need to demonstrate in uncertain times?

DS: When waging a battle against the underworld or any formidable force, the qualities of leadership must be extraordinary, almost ironclad. The foremost trait of such a leader is honesty. Only by being absolutely transparent and upright can one inspire trust and set a clear path for their people.

A true leader must also be quick in understanding situations, guiding the team through lawful means, calculated risks, and decisive actions. They must provide ample resources, training, and the vision needed to build a winning team. Leadership demands a 360-degree awareness of risks, along with the responsibility to shield one's people while equipping them to face challenges head-on.

Above all, the leader must personally embody courage. They cannot afford to project fear or hide behind layers of protection, such as Z-level security, while expecting their team or ordinary citizens to stand exposed. A leader must set the example of fearlessness, risk-taking, and unwavering commitment to the mission.

ET: Fear and confusion can spread quickly in uncertain moments. How can leaders keep their teams motivated and the public reassured under such conditions?

DS: Fear and confusion can indeed spread rapidly during uncertain times. History has shown us that even the shutdown of social media networks can trigger regime changes, as seen during the Generation Z-led revolution, or that communal tensions can quickly escalate into widespread violence. In such fragile situations, leadership plays a decisive role in maintaining order and morale.

To keep teams motivated, leaders must remain calm, steady, and above board. Consistency in conduct and communication is vital. This steadiness comes through constant training, regular skill-polishing, and continuous motivation. Importantly, leaders must lead by personal example, demonstrating courage, integrity, and decisiveness when it matters most.

Equally, leaders must ensure that their teams are empowered with sufficient resources, recognition, and fair opportunities for growth, whether through promotions, incentives, or public appreciation for good work. When teams feel supported and valued, they become more resilient under pressure.

Reassuring the public requires trust-building measures. For instance, during my tenure between 1998–2001, I created a dedicated helpline (22623333) which guaranteed anonymity to citizens who wished to share information. This initiative encouraged public participation in maintaining law and order while reassuring people that their safety and trust were protected.

Ultimately, leaders must balance firmness with empathy. By maintaining transparency, encouraging community involvement, and demonstrating through their own actions that they are unafraid, leaders can steady both their teams and the public in the most uncertain of times.

ET: Ethics are often tested in crises. How can leaders ensure values and integrity remain uncompromised under immense pressure?

DS: Ethics are tested not only during times of crisis but also in the routine challenges leaders face. Offers of bribes or other temptations are frequent, and leaders cannot claim that ethical challenges arise only due to pressure from superiors or politicians. Every such offer is a test of integrity, and it is the responsibility of the leader and their team to uphold values and honesty in all circumstances.

To strengthen ethical conduct, teams must be fairly rewarded for their work through promotions, medals, recognition, and opportunities for advancement. Such positive reinforcement motivates personnel to remain committed and ethical. However, rewards alone are not sufficient. Alongside the "carrots" of recognition and

incentives, leaders must also use the "stick" when necessary. This may include taking stringent departmental action or even dismissing corrupt individuals under Article 311 of the Indian Constitution.

In essence, a true leader must balance encouragement and discipline, rewarding and motivating honest officers generously while firmly eliminating the "black sheep." Only then can a leader prove that integrity is non-negotiable and cannot be taken for granted.

ET: Leading through uncertainty often takes a personal toll. What practices helped you stay calm, grounded, and decisive when everything around you was in flux?

DS: The personal toll of leadership often manifests in disturbed family life and deteriorating health. Stress can easily lead to high blood pressure, diabetes, or other lifestyle diseases. At home, tensions may arise between husband and wife, children may go astray, and some may even fall prey to substance abuse or alcoholism. These are the hidden costs that weigh heavily on those in positions of responsibility.

Yet, a leader of sterling quality must rise above such temptations and destructive habits. Remaining calm amidst life's storms and when pressure, criticism, and crises surround you is perhaps the greatest challenge. Practices such as meditation, prayer, or drawing strength from religious and philosophical traditions like Vedanta can help one stay grounded in values and inner discipline.

The truth, however, is that this is easier said than done. To remain stoic, healthy, and resilient requires constant effort and self-control. Speaking from personal experience, at the age of 75, after handling some of the toughest assignments - including six years in the Crime Branch battling the mafia and leading through the 26/11 terrorist attacks - I can say with pride that I have maintained both physical and mental health. I have never been admitted to a hospital. The reason is simple: I followed clean personal habits, moderation in food, regular exercise, and a conscious decision to stay away from temptations like money or unhealthy indulgences.

In the end, true leadership is not only about professional achievements but also about preserving personal integrity, health, and balance in life.

ET: Looking ahead, what kind of leadership do you believe India most needs in the next decade to navigate emerging uncertainties like cybercrime, AI risks, and geopolitical instability?

DS: In the modern era, marked by cybercrime, AI-driven risks, and geopolitical instability, crime has become both limitless and borderless. Today, anyone sitting thousands of kilometres away can commit the most heinous acts, whether triggering a blast, looting banks of billions through cyber-attacks, or disrupting critical infrastructure. Wars themselves increasingly have a cyber-dimension, as seen in recent conflicts like Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas, where digital warfare has played a decisive role.

In such circumstances, leadership demands agility, foresight, and intelligence. A modern leader must not only anticipate but also think at least 20 years ahead, preparing both themselves and their teams to handle challenges of cybercrime and AI-driven threats. Those who fail to adapt will inevitably be left behind or swept away.

Just as political leaders must constantly manoeuvre through geopolitical shifts, leaders in management, whether in government or corporate sectors, must invest in understanding and adapting to technological developments. Companies that fail to do so will quickly become obsolete, replaced by new enterprises aligned with modern realities.

Tech-savvy leaders of today already demonstrate these capabilities, and it is this forward-looking vision that will ensure resilience and relevance in times of rapid change.

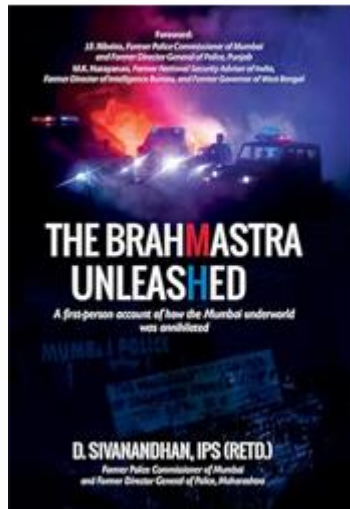
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We Recommend

Eliminating Crime with Courage & Innovation: A Leader Recounts

D. Sivanandhan

- Reviewed by Jay



Chinua Achebe's famous words, 'Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter', came to my mind when I read D. Sivanandhan's new book, [The Brahmastra Unleashed](#).

Popular fiction always presents the police as the hunter and criminals as the hunted. What if it is the other way around? Anyone who examines the reality of the Indian Police force will tell you that this large group of uniformed law enforcers work under the most extreme duress - insanely long hours (on bandobast duty), the worst kind of physical working conditions, irregular meal hours and unhygienic environment, etc. Their litany of woes has been listed in many Police Commission reports, but comprehensive reforms have never been undertaken. Such reforms would require a multitude of measures: systemic, organizational, social, economic, etc. The end result: we have only witnessed piece-meal changes as the political class neither has the will to change the ground reality, nor the resources at a national level to

undertake sweeping transformation. Thus, the colonial system and processes have largely continued, and we are saddled with hostility and mistrust between the public and the keepers of law.

It is no secret that the political class has provided protection and deployed criminal elements to achieve their objectives in a large number of cases across the country. But what is not fully appreciated is that criminal elements have been lionized in society due to the power of media. Books, magazines and films have been instrumental in spreading a subtle story line that the criminal is often the Robin Hood who protects and provides for the under-

privileged who have nowhere to go in pursuit of justice. In this social interpretation, the law enforcers are the bad guys, while the goons are victims suffering in the hands of the authority, and hence offers a justification of all criminal acts. Popular fiction loves the underdog story, and soon enough the criminal hits the front page of magazines and his life chronicle is gist for another cinematic potboiler.

So, who will speak for the Police force who have the herculean task of cleaning the Augean stables? A rare book has now emerged that presents a detailed description of one of the most sordid chapters of the role of criminal forces in India's commercial capital, Mumbai. What makes the book most credible is that it is penned by the legendary supercop, Dhanuskodi Sivanandhan, who has been widely acknowledged as a master strategist.

The book has a wide swathe as it traces the antecedents of notorious lawbreakers from the post-independence era to the first decade of the current century. In criminal terms, the book demystifies the Lala gang-Haji Mastan-Vardabhai period to the modern organized criminal network monitored and run from overseas bases. The book traces how large gang lords emerged from petty crimes to becoming rulers of the underworld. The Mumbai underworld's journey began with nibbling at the fringes through smuggling and small racketeering to feeding off the business class (mostly the illegitimate ones), to extortion and funding of the film world, to becoming narco-terrorists serving a foreign enemy's agenda fueled by political patronage. What the book also offers is evidence that criminalization everywhere is the result of social, economic, political and judicial failures, aided and abetted by rogue elements in all layers of society, not excluding the police force.

The book begins with events of October 1998 when there was public outcry against the political leadership at the abject failure in tackling the rise of organized crime in Mumbai city. Arguably the worst year in policing history with 93 recorded murders with firearms, and 367 reported incidents of extortions, the city's businessmen and citizens were lamenting the utter collapse of law and order. The government realized that the destruction of public confidence would ultimately lead to economic and social chaos and was compelled to take unprecedented steps to restore balance. Amongst the first steps they took in winning the perception battle was to move Mr. Sivanandhan from his role as DIG (Nagpur Branch) and induct him on promotion into Mumbai's police as Joint Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch). A sterling and unblemished officer became the point man in a battle to annihilate organized crime in the city.

The book outlines the various steps that were called into play to fight this ultimate battle. No war is won by strategies and weapons alone. Winning the hearts and minds of his troops was Sivanandhan's early step. The fallout of the Justice Aguiar Commission Report of 1997 (in essence that police encounters were staged killings) was a blow to the morale of Mumbai's finest and led to a sharp increase in extortions and gang-related shoot-outs. Addressing his team's internal challenges and demonstrating his visible and active support meant that he told his team that they were free to add his name to any FIR - indicating that they would not be alone to face the consequence of any judicial review. As regards the matter of encounters, Sivanandhan spells out the measures taken to appeal against the Aguiar Commission's finding, leading to the exoneration of the Mumbai Police and the matter led to new guidelines by the Mumbai High Court. Incidentally, it took 16 more years for the matter to be settled through the decision of the Supreme Court in 2014, upholding the Mumbai High Court's verdict.

A strategist recognizes that when the terrain is changing character, tired, old thinking and resorting to precedents for actions is the lazy leader's recourse. Instead, Sivanandhan sought guidance from the learnings drawn from the best in history. Kautilya's Arthashastra became the inspiration to tackle the evolving world of modern crime. The final result of studying global best practices, understanding the lacunae of existing legal frameworks, and ensuring practical checks and balances, was the enactment of a new law in 1999, the 'Maharashtra Control of Organized Crime Act (MCOCA). Acknowledged as the Brahmastra - a weapon of last resort with devastating power and lasting impact, to be wielded by a warrior of great personal discipline - it has not only served Mumbai Police well, this pioneering and innovative legal instrument became the model for other states as well.

Even to this day, the criminal underworld has not recovered from the body blow delivered by a rejuvenated Police force under Sivanandhan. While the book is largely a history of the rise and ultimate destruction of organized crime in Mumbai, it should never be forgotten that in the ultimate analysis it is not law alone that matters; it takes leadership to deploy and enforce the instrument or tool. Sivanandhan commands respect even today for his exceptional people skills that enabled him to lead by enthusing his large and diverse team, anticipate events by scanning the environment and learning to use technology to battle criminal minds.

What stands out is his personal courage as a leader - even in the worst of times, he walked about and mingled with people without any personal security or weapon. The message was clear: here was a leader who demonstrated that he empathized with his people (a team of over 40 thousand in Mumbai Police, and later of about 1.95 lakhs

personnel in Maharashtra Police) and took measures to secure their welfare (the hard testimonial is the three world-class schools that he built in Gadchiroli, Chandrapur and Thane during his tenure, apart from a slew of other steps). Sivanandhan credits the support he received from his superiors (Commissioner of Police RH Mendonca, and many others), and his colleagues for the success that they received. Managing multiple stakeholders was his forte and without that no weapon can be successfully launched.

A final thought. Today's India takes peace and good times for granted. It would be worthwhile to remember Santayana's famous words, 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'. A whole new generation basks in the pleasant conditions enjoying the benefits of sacrifices that earlier generations made. And that is as it should be, as after all, progress requires us to be better than the previous generation. However, it should never be ignored or forgotten that there were leaders who tackled adversity to create today's good times. As collective memory fades, this book written by one who was there at the time of deepest crisis - and who took bold steps to show the way of remedy from the bad times - is recommended to those who wish to know what truly occurred. Read and be inspired.

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THROUGH THE LENS



Nature photographer **Rupesh Balsara** recently spotted the Desert Wheatear in India, a rare treat for bird enthusiasts. Known for its striking plumage and agile movements across arid landscapes, this migratory bird feeds mainly on insects. Not considered endangered, it is classified as Least Concern by the IUCN, but sightings in India remain uncommon, highlighting both shifting migration patterns and the country's rich avian diversity.

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