

A case diary for the Indian police

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Context:

The higher ranks in the police force have to be conscious of the many problems that confront policing.

Introduction:

The three-day conference in Jaipur (in the first week of January) of police officers (Director General of Police level) from across India, was a kind of stocktaking exercise as well as learning experience, as many subjects of contemporary relevance in the area of Information Technology formed the core of the agenda.

Public image and Federal issues:

1. The police in India have a poor public image, with no respectable citizen willing to seek help unless in extreme distress.
2. Despite seven decades after India's Independence, citizens lack a guardian organisation to reach out to the poorest in the community, leading to no upgradation in the reputation of police forces.
3. The police commission has been unable to make much progress in this regard. The growing discord between the Centre and Opposition-led States is further complicated by the perception of the Indian Police Service (IPS) as unreliable intruders.
4. States prefer to have their own recruits, which is likely to exacerbate itself in the years to come. The role of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and its implications for federal governance must be sorted out sooner rather than later.
5. The attacks on ED officers in some places in India pose a danger to relations between New Delhi and states.

More technology adept:

1. In fairness to the police, however, it must be said that they have become more technology-savvy. It is possibly because we have more educated policemen in the lower echelons than before.
2. It is not because Indian youth rate a career in the police force very high. It is the sheer high rate of unemployment in India that is driving many to opt for a police job.
3. This is good so far as it goes. The question is whether the young men and women who become constables or sub-inspectors — the two ranks to which there is direct entry — will get an opportunity to display their talent.
4. This is because officers of the IPS alone hog all attention and the glory, depriving the lower ranks of any chance to prove themselves. The situation in most of the world is different.
5. Every recruit, barring a few highly qualified candidates needed for their knowledge of science and technology, starts at the lowest rung of the ladder and rises up the ranks.

6. This is the argument against the IPS, notwithstanding the fact the IPS officer is rated highly for his or her sharp mind and zeal. A major restructuring that narrows the gap between the higher ranks and the lower ranks could help in any exercise to drastically improve the quality of policing.
7. Knowledge and integrity will have to go together alongside genuine empathy for the common man if the image of India's police force has to improve.
8. This is ambitious but the blending can be achieved if senior police officers make an earnest attempt to change things. An anxiety to educate those at the lowest level in the forces is, unfortunately, not evident among IPS officers.
9. It is unfortunate that the structure of the hierarchy works against spending quality time with the constabulary.
10. Why cannot DGPs and their immediate subordinates spend an hour a day teaching their ranks how to expand their frontiers of knowledge and in turn, how to use it for the benefit of the common man?

The shadow of politics:

1. No discussion of policing can be concluded without referring to the eternal complaint of the politicisation of the police force. The nagging question of how to insulate our policemen from political caprice dominates all debates on the police.
2. This knotty problem is intertwined with the democratic system of government. It is an art to politely say 'no' to a downright illegal demand made by grassroots politicians. Not many can do it with tact. This is an aspect of policing that will continue for decades to come.

Conclusion:

Ensuring the independence and the autonomy of operation for the police force is a pipe dream until the whole polity changes. To chastise the police alone as being a slave to political directives is dishonesty to the core.

