

Improving Police Culture

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Abstract:

Economic activity and growth are deeply linked with safe environment and security. The police are the major respondent for maintenance of order and internal security in any society. Developed nations have developed police, whereas the police of the underdeveloped countries are suffering from a variety of anomalies. The police in Pakistan didn't achieve a high level of respect, dignity, performance and professionalism. There have been a number of initiatives, new laws and polices to improve police image and quality. But, instead of foreign injection and artificial grafting of services and ideas into the police, we need an indigenous and cost-effective approach, both in terms of structural and functional re-organization, to raise the competence, capacity, responsiveness and responsibility of the police in Pakistan; hence, improving police performance and police image. The article contains a few suggestions for creating such an improved police culture.

Keywords:

Police Culture, Security, Police Order 2002, Police Rules 1935, Police Station, Pakistan Penal Code, Human Rights, Police Service of Pakistan.

It is universally acknowledged that economic growth is the key to the spread of all kind of social benefits to the populace. And it is also generally agreed that there cannot be large scale economic uplift in an unsafe environment. Therefore, the dilemma facing the economic managers of developing nations is the prioritization between development expenditure and maintenance of the government machinery responsible for law and order. This dilemma has been resolved by various nations differently. Some, like Egypt, have put massive amounts of money in the law and order infrastructure, before they executed economic and fiscal reform. Others, like South Korea have let improved security follow fiscal space. But by and large the approach has been 'as- and when available.'

We fall in the third category.

The problem are that for any meaningful economic take-off we need a massive injection of direct foreign investment for which the buzzwords are a sense of security, functioning courts, and a fair civil society where there be human rights and gender sensitivity. The standards required are clearly laid down in various international instruments, to nearly all of which we are signatory. The rub is that countries which have the money to invest here take the monitoring of these standards very seriously a fact which is not generally given due weight even at the highest levels of civil society. Irrespective of the provisions of the other requirements which make economies tick, equally our stress needs to be on an up gradation of the social edifice.

The police is rightly considered to be the top player in crime -control and the establishment of law and order. And in this it is generally said that the police in Pakistan have much to do. When you ask senior police administrators why this be so, they come up with many quite valid reasons like bad recruitment, inadequate training and lack of adequate facilities etc. That these arguments are generally 'fair comment' has been underlined by various commissions and committees set up from time- to- time. The Police Order 2002 has addressed many such issues, but the full impact of that Order will not be visible for many years and that only if the Order is allowed to take effect in its true intent and if money is made available as per the roadmap of its implementation. Because in this country the police are given resources on a 'as-and when available' basis. We need to do the other things which would give an immediate uplift. This is possible by a change in the culture of the police forces, and does not require any money.

To begin with, you see that there are a total of around 280000 enrolled police officers in the country. Of these, while 87% are constables and head constables, 12% are investigation cadre (Inspectors, Sub-inspectors, and Assistant Sub- Inspectors). There are only 1% supervisory officers from Inspector-general to Superintendents. With this kind of mix, the quality of integrity, efficiency, and overall performance cannot be expected to be any better. This is a force largely made up of semi-literate men who are mostly from rural areas; where there is a very thinly spread investigative cadre ;where the number of supervisors is wholly inadequate --all this topped with little mobility, an archaic communication system and no judicial oversight. The easy and practical thing to do is to get constables vacancies converted into officers and investigators as and when there are retirements or other attritions. In a few years we can get the mix of advanced police forces; the models are there. This way what we lose in numbers would be more than made up by uplift in quality. And the budget would remain the same. Other than this elementary exercise there are a few other concepts worth considering:

Firstly, there is too much stress on the rank and privilege enjoyed by senior supervisors. The concept of chain of command is so strait jacketed that it is impossible for the next junior officer to even consider suggesting to his superior that the latter could be wrong or that there is a better way of sorting out a matter. Therefore a lot of collective wisdom is lost to the force and much waste is the order of the day. In police forces of advanced countries it is not uncommon for a rookie to get into an argument with his commander and the debate is settled on merit. We also need to work at a much more informal but not intimate system of inter se command and control structure. The artificial official distance in vogue between the rank structure is resultant to a stifling atmosphere which inhibits initiative and drive-two very desirable aspects of policing.

Secondly, the man on the spot needs to be given the confidence to do his job with authority and certainty. The prevalent requirement of reporting back and getting further directions is loaded with the wasteful danger that the situation on ground may irretrievably worsen while the man on the spot awaits further orders. This is a common everyday occurrence during civil unrest, making of arrests and other police operations. We see traffic constables in whose sight serious violations take place but who are not authorized to act. Their body language tells the futility of their morale. This is a colossal national waste that needs to be checked.

Thirdly, there is a common practice to do thoughtless postings without looking at the man and his fitness for the job. Also, very often, officers with specialized training are sent to positions where that expertise is lost. More and more, since 9/11 specialized training is being imparted by donor countries that naturally are more and more reluctant to keep their programs going if the expertise is lost operationally. So the best equipped personnel should be usefully employed on a long term basis to enable them to hone their new skills.

Fourthly, the monitoring of the activity leaves much to be desired. The Police Rules 1935 are now out dated. Policing is a very complex system and there is a lack of standing order procedures that are known to the rank and file. Even where there are clear regulations, regular monitoring is not done due to lack of automation by computer, hundreds of which are lying in police offices throughout the country gathering dust. The introduction of technology is vital to modern law enforcement but too much haste in this area can mean a lot of waste as well. There needs to be a retraining effort at all levels and this includes the very top. It has been the common experience worldwide that new ideas sink in slowly, specially in old organizations which are used to working in a certain mode sometimes for decades, like in the police force. This having been said, whatever technology is present must be used optimally.

Fifthly, the system of disciplining is extremely lax. Of the huge number of charge-sheets issued only a small number end up in removal from service. Of those removed, a large percentage is reinstated by various appellate authorities. The result is that a lot of bad apples remain in the basket. There are myriad reasons for this but senior police officers need to put their house in order in this area

Sixthly, the police station culture of discourtesy and indifference seems to defy any correction. I have always been amazed that men who come from a society with strong family values unlearn civilized behavior as soon as they are in a position of authority. Some moral rearmament is surely required. A strong code of ethics plus a zero-tolerance policy by supervisors may be the solution. It is of the utmost importance to improve the police station culture because of its close linkage to the concept of human rights that have become central to western thinking. It is agreed

that life, property, honor and liberty are sacrosanct and cannot be interfered with except by the 'due process of law' which is in itself a highly complex concept in jurisprudence. Similarly, the body of a human being is not to be violated except by own choice and even then only as permissible under the law. So, whereas one may agree to a medical operation suggested by doctors, it is illegal in this country to undergo an operation to donate a kidney.

The Pakistan Penal Code, as amended from time to time, makes the police more and more responsible that no excesses take place, but if newspaper reports are to be believed the image portrayed is one of daily mayhem in a large number of police stations. Such atrocities cause widespread odium at home and abroad. The assessment system evolved by international bodies like Amnesty International and the US Department of State in the human rights sector is that they go by press reports, the finding by trusted NGOs, and briefings by their embassies. Normally, these bodies publish annual reports that are given much weight by the policymakers so that a country which scores low on the human rights index has little chance of large-scale direct foreign investment specially from the G-8 nations. Pakistan has a low ranking which needs to be addressed. Another essential area to address is women's rights and gender equality. Some sections of the Haddood laws, the "honor killing" tradition and some high profile instances of violence to women have given this country a very bad name abroad. It matters little that there is widespread and universal condemnation of all these social distortions at home. There is ongoing effort underway to right the balance but the systems are so tardy that it will be years before these reforms take effect on ground, and even longer for the national image to change abroad.

In the interim, an improvement in the police procedures in the disposal of female offenders can be improved immediately. Criminality among women is widespread, specially theft of property and sexual offences, like prostitution, abetment in serious crime by associates. Therefore many women need to be taken in custody. There are standing instructions on the methods for enquiry and investigation of female detainees as also the precautions to be taken in case of their detention overnight. However, these procedures are not always followed due to various, and not always mala fide, reasons. Law reforms recently tabled restrict police powers to formally arrest women. This is not necessarily the right approach as instead the police needs to be made accountable. Courts supervision on police working what it is, the last hope of things improving is greater vigilance by senior police officers themselves.

The Police Service of Pakistan is the most sought after public sector career in this country today as it is the first choice of entrants to the Central Superior Service, which means that the best youngsters are taking on the onerous responsibility of

policing the nation. This is a new trend which has emerged after the District Management Group lost its pre-eminence due to the newly introduced system of Local Government. These young officers must be made aware of the various issues that effect our standing in the comity of nations, and that fair policing is vital to the national image.

Central to the overall untidy picture is that any improvement in the police culture would impact favorably on the security environment. Not only can this be done; additionally, it does not require any outside resource injection.

The writer Saiyed Mohib Asad is a former Director General of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Pakistan. He held many other important posts including, Deputy Director General of Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), the Inspector General of Police, Sindh and a member of the Federal Public Service Commission of Pakistan. Saiyed Mohib Asad got his LLB from University Law College, Lahore in 1967 and Barrister-at-Law from Lincoln's Inn, UK in 1965. He joined the Police Service of Pakistan (PSP) in 1969 and did his Master of Criminology from University of Keele in 1975. He regularly writes on various national and international issues, and is widely known as a reputed scholar on criminology and policing sciences in Pakistan. He can be reached at mohibs143@yahoo.com