

Rooting out police corruption

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The common defence for police corruption is that the police is part of society and it reflects the corrupt environment in which it operates. It is argued that in a sea of corruption you cannot make islands of honesty and integrity. This is a challenge that has defied solution, despite efforts by various governments. No society can sit back and accept this indefensible arrangement. If a society has to survive in a modern age it must find answers to such baffling questions, and to deal with the issue comprehensively and in totality. Piecemeal and partial solutions are bound to fail and that is exactly what has happened with all previous efforts in Pakistan. There are no shortcuts here.

Sadly, corruption has been tolerated and at times encouraged by various governments for short-term gains. The priorities of the governments particularly in political dispensation are so skewed that they mostly end up choosing officers at command level who will comply with their illegal orders, flout the laws and harass political opponents; as a trade-off, they are allowed to plunder and indulge in corruption and the fruits are also at times shared. There is a need to build a consensus amongst various political parties to ensure that the police is not involved in political score-settling and is allowed to function strictly in accordance with law.

This brings us to the issue of appointment of officers in key posts, which should be done through a transparent system of selection by a body where the civil society, the party in power and the opposition have a say. Such an arrangement was provided in the Police Order, 2002, but unfortunately changed to again give these powers to the executive without any check whatsoever. Apart from this fun-

damental and key issue of political will to establish a neutral police, there are other important factors of the police's structure, working conditions, salary, training and motivation that are vital to create an efficient, accountable police force that works for the people. In a limited sphere this experiment has to a great extent proved successful in Pakistan in the National Highways and Motorways Police (NH&MP). In the succeeding paragraphs these issues have been examined and comparison drawn with NH&MP. The purpose is to learn lessons from this experiment and replicate it in other police establishments.

The police department in Pakistan is the continuation of the force created by the British for a specific purpose. It was fundamentally designed on the pattern of the Irish Constabulary and aimed more to suppress the masses than provide them protection. Uneducated and semi-literate personnel were recruited in the lower ranks. About ninety percent of the force was in the lower ranks of constable and head constable. Most officers in these ranks have no prospects of any advancement, and since experience was required for policing, these men, unlike army or civil armed forces, were retained in the department till the age of normal superannuation that is sixty years. Once superseded, they continue in the same rank for decades and have practically no career. Direct recruitments in the middle-level and higher-level supervisory ranks of ASI and ASP are very limited.

This essentially is a flawed structure. On the recommendations of some of the committees and commissions after 1975, some steps were taken, and limited improvement was brought about only recently. No motivation or commitment can be expected from someone who has no career without any prospects of advancement. Experts

on management sciences are unanimous that one of the major factors for motivation is career advancement.

This issue was considered at the time of the designing of the Pakistan Motorway Police (PMP) and almost eighty percent of the posts were created in the rank of ASI and above. This factor not only provided a career to the members of the force but also ensured that enforcement was entrusted only to educated and well-trained officers closely supervised by senior-level officers above the rank of DSP/ASP. It also addressed the issue of a career as well as quality of policing at the operational level. This single feature has played a major role in creating a force that has continued to be a model of efficiency and honesty.

The working conditions of the police officers are, mildly, appalling. They have no facilities of boarding, lodging and conveyance. They have to perform their duties for long and uncertain hours with high risk to their lives because they are in the frontline against terrorism and organised crime. During the last ten years, about 1,000 policemen have lost their lives in the line of duty. On the other hand, the police leadership tends to deal with them harshly and sets unrealistic targets. This gives rise to low morale, low self-esteem and a defensive attitude. It also results in the neglect of children and families, leading to emotional and financial breakdowns. Despite these horrendous working conditions they are not even given reasonable wages.

This was an important aspect that was taken into account when the National Highways and Motorway Police (NH&MP) was established and pay was fixed realistically based on the market factors. In addition to this, the working conditions are excellent. They work in shifts, are provided very good transport and modern equipment. There

are no unrealistic targets and they are treated with respect. Based on the initial stage of the scale, the total monthly emolument of an inspector in the NH&MP is Rs18,496, compared to which the emolument of an ordinary inspector is Rs7,216; a constable draws Rs9,745 monthly in the NH&MP compared to the ordinary constable's salary of Rs5,431.

Police departments have continued to follow a harsh and non-transparent system of award and punishment. Due to political interference, the department has degenerated into political patronage or victimisation of officers. Out-of-turn promotions and postings on the higher posts are just patronage, resulting in marginalisation of honest and efficient officers. Officers at command level have been tossed around for refusing to comply with motivated or illegal orders. We have an example where an officer recruited as ASI became SP within ten years whereas in normal course it should have taken thirty years.

The NH&MP so far has a transparent system of punishment and reward. High achievers are given certificates of appreciation with handsome cash rewards, while errant officials are identified and given exemplary punishments. NH&MP Officers have received training by foreign and local experts, the central theme of which is service to the people. No wonder they continue to receive accolades for their courtesy, and examples of rescue and assistance, to ordinary citizens.

The most conspicuous aspect of the NH&MP's working environment is absence of any interference in the performance of their duties. There are no pressures, they are free to follow the law and proceed against any one, irrespective of his or her status. They have issued tickets to ministers, generals, senior police officers and bureaucrats. This required political will, exhibited in

this instance by the then prime minister, established a good tradition and no one has dared to change it. In contrast, the provincial police are subjected to interference and political pressure in all aspects of their duties.

Initially in the NH&MP officers were posted on deputation from the provinces and they were definitely not the best. They were mired in a corrupt environment where transferred to new environments that provided excellent working conditions, best equipment, first-class training, gave them dignity and pride and insulated them from any interference in their professional duties. These same officers have against all predictions performed a miracle by working efficiently and honestly. If this can be done in a proverbial corrupt traffic department, it can be done and replicated by other police throughout the country.

The police reform package cannot be selective. It has to be all-encompassing. The force must be restructured with an increase in the number of supervisory officers, transparent personnel policies, good training, improved working environment, modern and up to date arms/equipment. Last, but not least, what's needed is the political will to have a neutral police that is meant to serve the people and not for sustaining corrupt and inefficient governments. If we can do it we will win half the battle in converting Pakistan into a modern and progressive state. Police Order, 2002, was an attempt in this direction but, sadly, it was distorted for immediate political consideration even before its full implementation.

If the national leadership seriously wants Pakistan to have an efficient and honest police, it has no choice but to address the problem of reforming police comprehensively. We have a working and successful model and all that is required is to follow it in letter and spirit.