**Police complaints**

BY MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL 2020-11-05

VIOLATIONS of procedure and code of conduct, corruption and excessive use of force are common complaints against the police. Mishandling public complaints not only multiplies crime but also compromises the peace and image of the state.

Countries that inherited colonial policing systems are often confronted with a trust deficit. In the absence of autonomous complaint authorities, entrusting the disposal of complaints to the same department compromises fairness, which further erodes policecommunity relations. The majority of complainants are either unaware of the procedures, or are met with bureaucratic delays. This, as well as other issues such as compromising confidentiality, provides the accused ample opportunity to manoeuvre the inquiry to their advantage.

In Pakistan, the police`s public relations wings are plagued by capacity and resource constraints. They generally follow one-way communication, and focus on individuals` image building at the expense of the institutional image. Instead, they should focus on publicising complaints procedures.

Transparency increases public confidence.

Easy registration and early disposal of complaints, as well as the ability to appeal decisions, enhances the police`s credibility. It symbolises the police`s ef forts to uphold professional integrity.

In India, retired IG Kiran Bedi introduced the `beat box` system in Delhi, which significantly improved police-community relations.

In Pakistan, IG Nasir Durrani introduced the Police Access Service (PAS), which integrated all operational ranks of police and complainants, and analyses complaints statistics to monitor police performance.

Chapter X of the Police Order, 2002, mandated external oversight, but this was thwarted by the status quo. Article 36 of PO 2002 states that the DPO and head of the federallaw enforcement agency shallinform the police complaints authority of any incident or complaint of bodily harm to any person in police custody. Article 155 specifies punishments for certain types of police misconduct.

Without functional and autonomous police complaint authorities, however, this will remain a lof ty ideal.

Sections 6 (2) and 17(7) of the KP Police Act, 2017, empower the IGP to establish a public complaints section and complaints management system at regional and district levels. Section 46 linked local government tiers with district police. Local government heads are empowered to refer public complaints to the DPO and receive a report within 15 days. Owing to dysfunctional local bodies and litigation concerning composition of the scrutiny committee, regional police complaint authorities (Section 66) are yet to beconstituted.

Societies transitioning from colonial to democratic policing should enact laws, digitise processes and build capacity. But this is not possible without legal, procedural, institutional interventions and political ownership. Instead of manipulating and withholding statistics, the police should adopt an open and diagnostic approach. Creating free and easy complaints registration and adopting a liberal policy of sharing public records will not only build trust with the public, it will also help the police to understand the causes of complaints, which should become a part of the training curriculum. This data can also inform policies to improve police-community relations, as well as point to flaws in legislation or procedures that need amending.

Police oversight and complaints bodies can be classified as fully independent or hybrid bodies. England and Wales have an independent police complaints commission; similarly, Malaysia, the Maldives, New Zealand, and the Philippines have independent func-tional bodies. In New York, an independent mayoral agency was established to review police complaints, with the power to subpoena and recommend action against NY policeof ficers. Hybrid complaint bodies (such as in Canada, Liberia and the Netherlands), meanwhile, are either controlled by the police or the executive. In Pakistan, to deal with complaints, KP introduced PAS, Balochistan e-complaints, while Sindh and Punjab introduced complaint management systems.

Punjab Police reformed its complaints management apparatus; other provinces should adapt this to their needs.

In Pakistan, establishing oversight commissions by legislation can ensure autonomy. Bodies created by executive order remain under the executive`s shadow.

Moreover, complaints mechanisms need to be effectively linked with training and human resource branches. To ensure credibility, these mechanisms must be audited jointly by police, sociologists, rights activists and parliamentarians. We can assess the effectiveness of such systems through indicators such as improved public service delivery, reduction in police misconduct and timely resolution. But without political commitment, the public`s expectations will remainunfulfilled. The writer is the author of Paki stan : |n Between Extremism and Peace.

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