**Relics of the past**

BY MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL | 9/16/2019

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| RECENTLY at the first-ever SHO and moharrar conferences held in Mansehra, the real stakeholders had an opportunity to offer their input for improving public service delivery at police stations.  In the absence of structural reforms, most police chiefs opt for soft interventions without legal backing or strong political ownership, which is why these interventions prove to be short-lived, lasting only for the duration of their tenure. Structural adjustment is hence inevitable. But to be sustainable, this requires political ownership, third-party monitoring and evaluation, and additional resources.  Historically, police reform has been a closed-door issue with virtually no civil society input. Further, except for KP Police Act 2017, police reforms and police laws cannot be termed an exclusive outcome of public lobbying and parliamentary deliberations.  A few model police stations (PSs) were recently established but there is no independent body to evaluate service delivery.  In developed countries, the police are a front-line public service. However, in the former colonies, police chiefs have scarcely paid attention to growing police-public mistrust.  Most of them failed to realise that cosmetic changes may not transform the police`s colonial makeup.  The Police Station Inquiry Committee (1976), the Cabinet Committee on the Emoluments of SHOs (1982) and the Cabinet Committee on Determining the Status of SHOs (1983) were three endeavours with a focus on police stations and SHOs. Their recommendations were shelved.  Generally PSs present a shabby picture, surrounded by rusting case-property vehicles or piles of sandbags. They hardly cater to the needs of complainants. Several have in the past been targeted by terrorists, exposing their structural security weaknesses. The KP police standardised the design for new PSs, though the old ones too must be revamped.  However, without transparent internal accountability, public safety and public complaint mechanisms, PSs will continue to function along colonial lines. A separate budgetary allocation for them which does not exist and empowering SHOs will ensure transparency and discourage corruption.  Police-community programmes, such as those undertaken by the KP police, and attitudinal change on part of the law-enforcement agencies, are vital if the police-public trust deficit is to be reduced.  Though the original colonial policing model encouraged police-public interaction, the gulf between the two widened over time.  To address this, community policing needs to be revived. Foot patrolling was an effective means to stay in touch with the public andcollect credible information.  Unearthing sleeper cells and ferreting out facilitators of terrorism requires a revival of the defunct `beat` system. Expansion of slums and migration from rural to urban areas has drastically altered demographics and reduced PSs to mere reporting centres.  Touring villages and holding open houses were useful practices but have fallen out of favour owing to largely to security threats and disinterest on the part of senior police officials. This approach trickled down; soon even SHOs neglected to learn the dynamics of their area.  The new Karachi police chief has rightly suggested reducing the number of PSs from 107 to 45. Instead, given the actual issue is non-reporting of crimes, reporting points will be increased. More focus is to be paid to investigations.  Also, PSs are averse to technology, which is only being used for typing memos.  Optimum use of social media will reduce the gulf between the police and public. Moreinvestment in policing and apolitical public safety apparatuses will add to people`s confidence in law enforcement. Introduction of women police desks at PSs in KP is a step that needs to be replicated.  Often the long chain of command in the police service (12 ranks) creates inconvenience for victimsof crime. To seek help, complainants often Erst approach the senior ranks. In order to make PSs more ef ficient, junior officers must be able to the help victims with less intervention of senior officers. However, that is not possible without winning trust, dedication and capacity building.  As per the Police Rules, PSs` inspection and crime review meetings are important obligations, but they have been reduced to a mere formality. Inspections ensured crime management, monitoring of quality of investigations and safe custody of case properties.  Inspections and touring helped officers recognise the capabilities of junior officers and understand criminal trends. The sharing of such 1(nowledge with other stakeholders was very beneficial.  It is imperative for the government to be apprised of the correct picture of crime, so it can plan and allocate resources accordingly. However, de-politicisation is essential to transform PSs into public facilitation centres. The writer is the author of Pakistan : |n Between Extremism and Peace.  Twitter: @alibabakhel |  |