**Inflation: Crime and response**

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Reading memoirs of our elders, I came to know that with the commencement of the First World War in 1914, the people of the subcontinent witnessed an unprecedented price hike: The price of daily edible items surged to twice the actual amount. Alas, after one century or more, the enormous increase in petrol price and the devaluing of the Pakistani rupee have brought us to the same situation. Surprisingly, the reason is no war but the incompetency of our policymakers, and yet, they are poised not to take any responsibility. Some of us, being financially comfortable, are feeling the heat of the fire burning around us. I am afraid, how long will we avoid it? If ‘Response Emergency’ is not declared, the inferno will engulf us all. Rich and poor alike.
In the days to come, people will find it difficult to pay their bills, the purchase of bread and butter will go out of reach, being fired from jobs and unable to pay their children’s school fees will multiply their frustration, forcing them to resort to corruption and crime. The flood will sweep our homes and God forbid, we may not confront a Sri Lanka-like situation. The demand of the time is to take preemptive and proactive measures. Bluntly, it is the worst time ever for law enforcement. Global Terrorism Index–2021 has already ranked us 130 out of 139 in the Rule of Law index, with a precipitous decline for the past 3 years, 20 out of 20 in the Order and Security index in Asia-Pacific, and 10 out of 163 as worst-hit by terrorism globally.
The bizarre narrative over the years is that crime is caused by the police department. It is as absurd as to say that fires occur because of firefighters, or a patient dies due to doctors’ inaction. Yet, it is unquestionably true that in cases where departments fail to respond, and remedial measures are unprofessional, problems do escalate to the point where delinquents must be held accountable. The bitter truth is due process in the Criminal Justice system (CJS) has been halted because of capacity, capability, and lack of fervor. We have too many ifs and buts within the CJS, all passing the buck of failure to the actions of others, declaring themselves the seraphic of the modern era.
Foreseeing the rise in crime, available resources, and capacity of our police and CJS, the demand of the time is Community Policing (CP)—a philosophy and practice that treats police-community interaction as the main basis for reducing crime. Since the aim is to “prevent and address root causes of crime” rather than simply unravel after they have been committed, it is pragmatic and doable. As a result of developing confidence-building measures in Islamabad, where I served as SSP and IG, a citizen provided information that led to the nabbing of high-profile terrorists. The chapati seller (nanbai) in Karal, an area on the outskirts of Islamabad, told us that in one particular house only two people lived, but they bought thirty-forty chapattis every day. Our raid uncovered ten bandits hiding there. In another incident, a housemaid confided that her master had been getting into strange affairs, and she had seen guns in his house. He turned out to be a wanted outlaw as well.
The law affirms that every citizen is a lawman, and has the right to defend himself (PPC sec 96-106), protect others (Cr. Pc 59), and ensure that the law is upheld. It was successfully applied in primitive times, implying that empowerment should not be the goal, but returning the responsibility to the people. The police high-ups need to take the lead to spread out to the masses, involve the area’s notables, mix at the grassroots level and develop confidence-building measures. Also, the Police Department must hire Special Police Officers from responsible citizens with no criminal records for the additional task of setting up neighbourhood watches, conciliatory committees, peace committees, intelligence committees and women and child protection centres.
To be clear, politicians may perceive CP as a social service, a threat to their electoral domain and detachment from potential voters. Yet all those opposed must be made aware of the importance of it, at a time when crime is likely to spike. Whenever we hear, “Pakistan is at a crossroads” we should be ready for the blame to be passed on to former regimes and the game to continue. Optimism combined with self-help is our option, and we can create a better world of help and care, both large and small. “To expect bad not to do wrong is madness”, but waste no more time arguing about what a good person can do.