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Overhauling the police

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Policemen are not only inadequately trained but also don't have access to modern, sophisticated weapons

From its introduction into the British Empire in 1895 to the time it gave way to self-loading rifles in the 1960s, the .303 Lee-Enfield rifle was an outstanding weapon. But today, this antique rifle which has to be manually loaded for each shot, and is standard issue for India's policemen symbolises the asymmetry between them and the terrorists they must face: an aging, outmoded weapon pitted against the AK-47 that can spit 30 bullets in one automatic burst.

Locomotives of India's growth story, the six metros are magnets for investment and prime targets for terrorists. Booming growth has outstripped investment in security infrastructure over the years, with

the police force having been nibbled away by corruption and systemic neglect. When faced with a threat like the attacks on Mumbai, it collapses.

India's police forces are grossly understaffed. The country has one of the lowest policemen to population ratios in the world, just 142 per lakh people compared to ratios of 250 per lakh in Western countries. The 40,000-strong Mumbai Police, for instance, is short by 15 per cent on manpower and heavily overstretched. This is the case in most metros.

Urgently needed

The forces don't have modern communication equipment, little personal protection like bullet-proof jackets and helmets and, worse, no specialised teams to deal with heavy assaults. Even the

- 1 lakh Level III bullet-proof jacket
Rs 300 crore
- 1 lakh Kevlar helmets
Rs 100 crore
- 1 lakh automatic carbines to replace 303 / SLR rifles
Rs 5,000 crore

bomb disposal squads are understaffed and underequipped.

There is also an asymmetry between the Centre and states when it comes to technology and fighting terror. Part of this has to do with the legacy of the 1980s where terror was essentially confined to north India— Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and New Delhi.

The Home Ministry created the National Security Guard (NSG), a one-stop shop to deal with hijackings, bomb threats and urban assaults. With terrorism spreading into the hinterland and the new spectre of suicide commandos, metro police forces have been

caught unprepared.

Metros are now abjectly dependent on distantly located forces like the NSG not only for the Special Force personnel but also for bomb squads and postblast forensic investigations. Funds are left unutilised. For instance, in 2006-07, states spent just over 60 per cent of liberal Central grants, returning unspent money even as the backlog of basic equipment like X-ray machines, modern weapons and communication tools, piled up.

There is little that has not been already said about the crying need to reform the police force. At least five police reform committees since 1998 headed by Julio Ribeiro, Justice Malimath, Padmanabhaiah, Soli Sorabjee and Veerappa Moily have said repeated ad nauseum.

Police-to-population ratio in select countries

Country	Police per lakh population
India	142
Japan	175

“It would be prudent for the policy makers to realise that the present-day challenge to internal security, especially those posed by covert designs of Pakistan’s ISI or Maoist-Marxist extremist groups are of such a nature that to meet them effectively, the country needs a highly motivated, professionally skilled, infrastructurally self-sufficient and sophisticatedly-trained police force,” the Padmanabhaiah Committee noted presciently in 2000. Two years ago, the Second Administrative Commission headed by Moily listed inadequate training and infrastructure for the police was one of a dozen weaknesses in the legal framework.

To see the difference training and infrastructure can make to the

UK	200
Germany	300
Australia	290
USA	315
<i>Courtesy: Ministry of Home Affairs</i>	

police force, one has to visit the Counter Terrorism and Jungle Warfare School at Kanker in Chhattisgarh where state policemen undergo a six-month course. Besides equipping them to use modern weapons, the training physically conditions them, sharpens their reflexes and trains them to take the initiative in ambushes. The results are there to see. A kill ratio of five policemen for every Naxalite has been reversed to one policeman for five Naxalites in three years. The Home Ministry's plan to set up 20 such schools all over the country is a vindication of the need for such a reorientation.

An ideal place to begin changing the force would be in police control rooms, perhaps the most overlooked aspect of metro policing. In military strategy and business parlance, the Observe-Orient-Decide-Act or the OODA loop is said to be the most critical aspect of a fast unfolding situation.

Police control rooms need to be immediately upgraded into large military-like command and communication hubs equipped with secure communication, phones, faxes and the Internet. They should be linked with other armed forces, intelligence agencies and receive feeds from CCTVs all across the city.

Constabulary is the key

A constable is the first line of defence and often the weakest link in the chain

Education: A constable is required to have just a school-leaving certificate.

Salary: Paid between Rs 3,200 to Rs 4,900, about that of a semi-skilled worker.

Promotion: He can expect only one

These control rooms need to be manned round-the-clock by young, ranking and energetic officers with rapid decision-making ability. These control rooms should have large Google Earth-like digital map projections of the city and a fleet of fast cars capable of reaching any trouble spot within five minutes.

Trained and heavily armed Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams of around 100 personnel with special weapons, communication devices, armoured vehicles and helicopters should be immediately raised in all the major metros to ensure quick reaction teams for 24x7 emergencies. New technology like facial recognition software and day-night CCTV cameras needs to be embraced.

promotion in his lifetime and generally retires as a head constable.

No application of mind: All investigative powers are with the SHO, leaving the constable as an automaton carrying out orders with no personal initiative.

All India vacancies

Constables: 1.13 Lakh

Sub Inspectors: 18,654

Dy SPs: 2099

Courtesy: Ministry of Home Affairs

For the police forces, buying communication equipment and weaponry off-the-shelf is only one part of the challenge—cutting through bureaucratic red tape to spend money in time will be a greater one.

Training a policeman to use modern weapons is another challenge because an untrained policeman armed with a sophisticated Heckler and Koch MP-5 sub-machine gun is as good as unarmed. Another measure would be to guard major landmarks and practice counter-terrorism drills there. Digital blueprints of all major landmarks including hotels, IT parks, malls and large offices must be kept by the police to help plan for eventualities like hostage situations. Policemen must also be trained to act as negotiators in a crisis situation.

Intelligence branches need to be staffed with career officers. There's a need to create intelligence analysis units dedicated to analysing inputs received from state and central intelligence agencies. Not being proactive on policing will mean an invitation to terrorists to strike at our engines of growth.

EXPERTS' OPINION

Security experts offer an insight into what can be done to ensure greater safety.

Prakash Singh Former DG, BSF

- Immediate filling up of vacancies in the police force.
- Stop using the police force to protect criminal-politicians.
- SWAT teams should be set up for metros.
- Effective control rooms to ensure a threeminute response time.

Julio Ribeiro

Former DGP, Punjab

- Leaders should be selected from a list of empanelled officers
- Give operational freedom to senior officers.
- Investigation agency should be separate from law and order machinery.
- Public participation in policing.

Brig B.K. Ponwar

Director, CTJWS, Kanker

- Policemen have to be combatised.
- Train them in reflex shooting for a counter-terrorism environment.
- Replace old rifles with modern carbines like MP-5.
- Improve leadership at ASI, SI and SP level.

Ajay Sahni

ED, Centre for Conflict Studies

- Invest in policing as a planned outlay.
- Utilise existing capacities more efficiently by retraining.
- Bring police-population ratios in line with required norms.
- Establish intelligence capacities within the State Police.

ACTION PLAN

CONTROL rooms manned round-the-clock by energetic officers.

SWAT teams of 100 men in each city capable of withstanding and repelling heavy assaults, hostage situations and building intervention.

INCREASE in manpower. Filling up of all vacant posts. Reviving beat policing.

POLICEMEN to be trained in on-ground operational exercises for high building interventions in various locations like malls, multiplexes and hotels.

BETTER training for all personnel. Frequent access to police firing ranges.

REORIENTATION of the policeman—from a FIR-based post-crime approach to a pro-active initiative—based approach.

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