

A Policeman's Perspective

• **Dr. M.N. Buch**

I was a member of the Indian Administrative Service and not of the Indian Police Service, but in various official capacities I have had close dealings with the police and, therefore, have ventured to write a paper which looks at the problems of policing from a policeman's point of view. This has become necessary because in the Delhi rape case there has been an enormous outpouring of public anger in which the police has also become a target. It has further become necessary because in the case of a jawan of the 13th Rajputana Rifles the whole nation rose in outrage against Pakistanis whereas in the case of the brutal murder of eleven CRP jawans by Naxalites in Latehar District of Jharkhand, in which the bodies were mutilated and stuffed with explosives, not one member of so-called civil society expressed one word of anguish. Earlier seventy-six jawans of CRP have been butchered in an ambush by Naxalites in Bastar. No member of civil society either mourned their death nor sympathised with their families. Just as the soldier was doing his duty in Jammu & Kashmir these policemen were doing their duty in Naxalite affected areas. I compliment Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh for equally honouring and compensating the army jawan who hailed from Sidhi District and the CRP jawan who hailed from Ratlam District, both of whom gave their lives for the security of this nation. The police in India, at a macro level, is as patriotic as army and more policemen have been killed in defence of India since independence than perhaps even men of the army.

At operational level undoubtedly things are not all well with the police. There is a general perception that policemen are not pro-people, in many cases they themselves are predators and a police station is not a place to visit even for the purpose of filing a complaint. As the coercive arm of government the police is also accused of use of excessive force against people who are agitating, while proving ineffective in dealing with incidents of rioting by anti social elements, communal riots and such other disturbances of the peace which should have been dealt with very firmly at the earliest juncture. The criticism is not without justification and there are police officers such as Prakash Singh who have not only expressed concern about the failure of policing but have also spent years in petitioning the Supreme Court to force government to bring about the type of reform which would make the police law abiding, effective but also fully accountable. I was member of the Soli Sorabji Committee constituted at the behest of the Supreme Court, which has recommended a set of police reforms and drafted a Police Bill which would help in the process. Having said that I would still submit that there is a command failure in the police which has resulted in the Force becoming less people friendly and effective in law enforcement than it was designed to be introduced. We need a very good, hard look at not only the command structure but also the motivation and effectiveness of senior police officers, especially those in the Indian Police Service and the gazetted ranks of the State Police Service. Are these officers personally honest? Do their subordinates have respect for them because they effectively command the force? Do they suitably guide their subordinates in their working, monitor their performance and ensure that they are fully accountable? Do they promote good relation between the police and the community? In short, are they like Ramrao Dube who was Superintendent of Police with me from 1965 to 1967 when I was District Magistrate of

Ujjain? This officer cared so much for the people of the district that whereas on the one hand he provided strict and effective policing, on the other hand, when milk vendors went on strike he, on his own initiative, had milk collected from surrounding villages and saw to it that for three days the city's milk supply was maintained by the joint efforts of the police and the District Civil Supplies office. Ramrao Dube was both respected and loved in the district and he is the type of police officer who has to be emulated by every officer-in-command.

The cutting edge level of the police is the police station, headed by a Station Officer of the rank of Inspector or Sub Inspector. The only mention of a police station in the model Police Act drafted by the Soli Sorabji Committee is in clause 12 of Chapter 11, but it is at best a passing reference. The fact is that under the Code of Criminal Procedure the unit for registration of offences and their investigation under Chapter XII is the police station. Almost all our police stations are undermanned and ill equipped. Had the Colaba police station in Mumbai been adequately organised, manned and equipped, when the ten terrorists who landed near the Yacht Club and were seen by a fisherman, it is a beat constable who should have detected them and quickly passed on information to the police station. Had the police station reacted immediately and dispatched adequate forces the first encounter might have taken place before the terrorists dispersed to their designated destinations and the bloodshed in the city could have been avoided.

What is the fate of the police station staff? The station officer is torn between regular policing of a preventive nature, registration and investigation of offences, surveillance of would-be trouble makers and criminals, VIP duty, crowd control, bundobust and quite often pandering to the whims and demands of senior officers and their wives. The constabulary has long hours of duty, with policemen on the streets in all kinds of weather, with poor logistical support and often in conflict with trouble makers, agitators, etc. They are also in real physical danger on being hurt or even killed. Preventive action is frowned upon as interference with the liberty of the citizen, refraining from such action is condemned as dereliction of duty, not using force is looked upon as inaction and using force is deemed as excessive. In anti-terrorist, anti-dacoity, anti-Naxalite operations the situation is very much like war. A soldier making war is eulogised, the police acting in self-defence is condemned. Whereas police officers need to introspect on their own behaviour and conduct, should not society also look at its own attitude towards the police? I learnt very early in Morena District, then the epicentre of dacoity, that when a MLA kept complaining against the police, which complaints were almost totally false, and the District Magistrate ordered the closure of a police station at Birpur, that same MLA fell at his feet and begged him not to withdraw the police as it would leave the area defenceless. In other words, society needs the police and, therefore, society must also help it to perform its duty.

To return to those eleven CRP jawans, should not civil society have reacted to this in the same manner as it has to the beheading of a soldier by the Pakistanis? The life of an Indian policeman is very hard and whereas no one can excuse policemen for wrongdoing, nor the officials of the Delhi Police who failed to take effective preventive action in the recent rape in a moving bus, the police is also entitled to sympathy and the support of civil society.
