

Police reform specifics

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IN the foregoing years, police reform in Bangladesh received considerable attention by the media. Many articles were written on issues like legal reforms, gender mainstreaming, capacity building, public perception etc. News bulletins have covered the opening of service delivery centres, inauguration of "Open Days" victim support centre and introduction of community policing in police stations. Ongoing reform initiatives of Bangladesh police are, therefore, very much in the public eye.

The basic principles of modern policing, formulated by Sir Robert Peel in 1829, are still applicable today; the basic mission of police is to prevent crime and disorder, the ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon the public approval of police actions, police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police are only members of the

public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent upon every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.

Management practices and operational strategies may have changed but these principles remain and emphasise the interaction and dependencies between the police and the public. One of the challenges for the police and police leadership in particular is to ensure that it is capable of dealing with modern day challenges while still preserving these fundamental policing tenets.

Often, the complaint is that the police response is reactive and bureaucratic, focusing on procedures and efficiency rather than on innovation or strategic planning. In many cases, police are often criticised for resisting change and being insular, not readily accepting outsiders. The police leadership needs to ensure not only that they lead by example in taking up the reforms but also that they motivate the police rank and file to implement and to sustain the change. Only then will reforms be truly sustainable.

The three main driving forces behind modern police reform, as recognised globally are:

- Community policing,
- Technological progress, and
- Professionalism and accountability.

These three areas together form a solid foundation for supporting a new policing style, capable of reaching all levels of police structure, from senior officers and managers to frontline officers who are the daily face of police to the community.

The concept of community policing has its roots in the concept of public policing as proposed by Peel. It is both a philosophy and a strategy for the police and community to identify new ways of addressing the issues of crime, disorder and safety. As a strategy, it is based on policing by consent without coercion, with police seen as part of the community working together in partnership to identify community needs and adjusting policing priorities to address them.

This important strategy recognises police officers as more than just crime busters, responding to calls for assistance after the crime has occurred. The underlying principles of community policing include meaningful community engagement and better utilisation of police officers within the community. The latter is very critical for, if the community is distrustful of the police, it will not consider the police as its partner.

The field of technology is experiencing accelerated change. The number of technological advancements related to policing is vast, ranging from computers and communications to genetics and transportation. This progress provides many opportunities for improvement in crime control, prevention and investigation. For example, computer systems provide effective information tools and DNA analysis provides a virtually foolproof method of identifying offenders.

However, it is necessary to develop planning and conceptualise how these new technologies are best used to support police. The potential for unlawful



Photo: Police are part of the community.

invasion of privacy and misuse of access to confidential and sensitive data is very significant. Many police organisations go to extreme lengths to ensure that police officers, who by the very nature of their job have access to sensitive information, do so only for a legitimate purpose.

Dealing with criminal exploitation of technology is a particular challenge. With the advent of internet, the world has become a much smaller place, removing borders and allowing individuals to become transnational criminals. Combating this new version of crime, cyber crime, will require national, regional and international collaboration. Also, the question of the affordability of new technologies, their availability and sustainability is of particular importance to Bangladesh police and associated reforms; these new technologies are not cheap, not always available for export and require a lot of effort to maintain.

The recognition of police as a professional and accountable institution is essential towards the implementation of an ideal policing model. Training reform needs to facilitate organisational shift towards a consultative, community-oriented, professional police service, proactively focused on crime prevention. The scope of training has to deal with, among others, the themes of leadership and management, crime prevention and awareness, forensic, investigation and investigation management, trafficking in human beings, criminal intelligence and domestic violence and sexual assault.

By its very nature, professionalism also requires adherence to a code of ethics and standards of conduct, a public service orientation, existence of common goals and principles and an organisation that promotes high standards and the interests of the profession. The achievement of these common characteristics through the reform process develops greater public confidence in police, improves the morale of police officers and allows them to fulfill their role as true community partners. It also makes them more accountable and empowers them to be more responsive.

The process of police reform is complex and subject to overcoming many obstacles of political, financial, historical and personal nature. A number of police commissions were constituted in Bangladesh in the past to reform the police; however, hardly any recommendations were put into action and no substantive changes in the public perception of the police were achieved.

With new initiatives such as drafting of the new police ordinance, police training reform, development of community policing approach, publication of gender guidelines and addressing of the gender balance within the organisation, the main challenge now is to ensure that these and other reforms that will emerge are taken seriously by all, implemented and sustained. Only then can Bangladesh police be transformed into a modern police service, worthy of a democratic society, accountable and responsive to community needs that function according to the law and regulations, and respect the human rights of the people and protect their rights.

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