



NINA SINGH

Class monitors

There are enough simple fixes for policing problems. Better training, for one

MANY of us still vividly remember the telling image from earlier this year of a cop mercilessly thrashing a six-year-old Dalit girl in Etawah, UP, for apparently stealing a paltry 280 rupees. The erring cop was sacked, and rightfully so. Police brutality and high-handedness are not unique to India — consider the infamous 1991 Rodney King case that implicated the Los Angeles Police Department, or the more recent misconduct of the London police in dealing with G-20 protestors — but elsewhere, these organisations have recognised this as a major problem and have also adopted strategies to tackle it. The leadership exchange programme of the London Metropolitan Police with business leaders reportedly improved policing standards. Similarly, the New York Police Department's (NYPD) strategy of CPR (courtesy, professionalism and respect) is also said to have increased public satisfaction.

Ironically, while public perception of police here is largely negative, policemen themselves suffer from abysmally low self-esteem. The latter was corroborated by a study conducted by Rajasthan Police in collaboration with MIT, in which a majority of policepersons were discovered to be suffering from poor self-image. A typical police constable in India is generally overworked and underpaid; he lives in pathetic conditions with virtually no time for his family. They tend to feel that they

are not looked after well by the system either. This alienation can be expressed in brutal behaviour.

For several years, experts have been talking about big-ticket police reforms: insulating police from political interference and stability of tenure, among many others, as mentioned by the Supreme Court in *Prakash Singh vs Union of India*. Various police commissions have also come up with numerous recommendations. How long should the police wait for these to happen?

It is high time the police administration developed and implemented interventions, even small, that are quickly doable. While ensuring a transparent and

ally a disgruntled lot — perpetually waiting for a transfer to a field posting. Importantly, training curricula are old and archaic, bereft of modern techniques and concepts, still influenced by the colonial legacy of the British — who tried to raise the Indian police on the pattern of the Irish constabulary. Even in-service training is not accorded a particularly high priority, with a pre-occupation with supposedly more important issues frequently cited as a reason.

So, allocate adequate resources to training facilities; use them to build reasonable infrastructure, source equipment and hire quality trainers. But also revamp the

nity-centric approach. Often, police personnel are not sent for in-service training at outstation facilities, on the pretext that they cannot be spared from field jobs. The NYPD, faced with a similar constraint, evolved the concept of in situ training at police stations, where a "training sergeant" was given the special responsibility of training fellow cops.

Even small, effective training does result in improved policing. Ample evidence backs that up. During the Rajasthan Police-MIT study, an attempt was made to evaluate the impact of training on the performance of police at 150 police stations across 11 districts of the state. Two separate training modules were prepared: one on professional skills (the use of scientific techniques in investigation) and the other on soft skills (communication, leadership, public relations, stress management, etc.) The result indicated that in police stations where 100 per cent of the staff was trained, the victim satisfaction level increased by 34 per cent; a truly giant leap.

As democracy in India matures and its society transforms, the Indian police needs to move beyond its traditional stereotypes, and reach out to the public. Training is the most critical catalyst for effective policing; image-building will follow naturally.

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merit-based process of recruitment at the constable level is the first and foremost essential prerequisite, the most important sector that requires immediate attention is training.

Training is of two categories: first, the basic training imparted immediately after recruitment that builds the foundations of a future cop; second, in-service training held periodically to update a serving policeperson's skill-set. Most basic training facilities are ill-equipped and overcrowded. Trainers, picked from among serving officers, are not only under-qualified, but they are also mostly disinterested and usu-

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Similarly, in-service training must keep pace with the rapid transformation of Indian society. The paradigms of policing must also change towards a commu-

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