Improving India's Policing

What is the issue?

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The recent Nirbhaya ruling, where the Supreme Court confirmed the death penalty for four of the accused in the gang rape and murder case of a paramedical student in Delhi in 2012, is also an occasion to examine certain fundamental assumptions about policing.

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What was the initial focus of policing?

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- The focus of law enforcement was initially on disciplining unruly elements disturbing public peace rather than on hunting for criminals depriving others of their life and property.
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- Now, the crime is not only widespread and violent but also sophisticated with the abundant use of technology.
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- A fall-out is raising fear in a community, especially among elders, women and children. The police force must address this fear in a focussed manner.
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Is there a trust deficit?

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- Several surveys point to a demand for protection of life more than guarding individual property.
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- With the phenomenal expansion of the geographic area to be policed and the

mind-boggling increase in the number of lives to be guarded, the Indian police, more than in many western democracies, have been stretched and outnumbered.

- There are only about **140 policemen per 100,000 people,** a very poor ratio when compared to other modern democracies.
- The strongest criticism against the police is of their preoccupation with the problems of the political party in power and those of the rich and famous.
- The **phenomenal rise in private security agencies** accounts for the growing lack of trust in the state police.

What are the lessons that can be learned from abroad?

- Learning in public administration is a recognised healthy exercise the world over.
- The New York Police Department (NYPD) instituted a **COMPSTAT** (short for COMPuter STATistics) programme that analysed crime with the help of computers, identified crime hotspots and took preventive action, such as intensified patrolling.
- Police commanders in New York were made to report to the commissioner each week explaining how they were tackling crime in their jurisdictions.
- This mechanism not only brought about greater attention to crime in the field but also enhanced police accountability at the grass-root level.
- The NYPD has recently gone beyond COMPSTAT by hiring a reputed private agency to survey public opinion on police performance.
- Focussed questions over mobile phones and the responses obtained look at how to fill visible gaps in policing.

Is there any hope in India?

- The availability of a corps of leadership in the form of technically savvy young Indian Police Service officers who have a stake in working closely with the community to carry out experiments in the field to upgrade safety at minimum cost to the government.
- The spread of Internet use at all levels of the police. An offshoot is the use of social media in day-to-day policing.
- Information on crime incidents and criminals is as a matter of course conveyed to the public in many urban centres with encouraging results.
- Citizens are also encouraged to report crime through email or over social media. This practice gives no option for the police but to act without fail and swiftly.
- The participation of the print and visual media in this dialogue gives further fillip to the exercise of sensitising the police to the community demand for safety through police processes.

Source: The Hindu