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.

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- There are only about **140 policemen per 100,000 people,** a very poor ratio when compared to other modern democracies.
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- 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.
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- The **phenomenal rise in private security agencies** accounts for the growing lack of trust in the state police.
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What are the lessons that can be learned from abroad?

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- Learning in public administration is a recognised healthy exercise the world over.
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- 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.
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- Police commanders in New York were made to report to the commissioner each week explaining how they were tackling crime in their jurisdictions.
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- This mechanism not only brought about greater attention to crime in the field but also enhanced police accountability at the grass-root level.
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- The NYPD has recently gone beyond COMPSTAT by hiring a reputed private agency to survey public opinion on police performance.
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- Focussed questions over mobile phones and the responses obtained look at how to fill visible gaps in policing.
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Is there any hope in India?

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- 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.
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- The spread of Internet use at all levels of the police. An offshoot is the use of social media in day-to-day policing.
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- Information on crime incidents and criminals is as a matter of course conveyed to the public in many urban centres with encouraging results.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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Source: The Hindu

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