

## PROTECTING THE POLICE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

Before the police could get fully vaccinated, the second wave of COVID-19 hit India more severely than anyone could have expected. Curfews and lockdowns have been imposed again in some regions to break the chain of transmission, but the challenges for the police are more varied and serious now.

Last year, most of the problem was limited to migrant labour following the nationwide lockdown — providing them ration, transport, and inter-State passes. The pandemic being the first of its kind for the current generation, the police faced a tough time enforcing the rules that came with various lockdowns. The punishment for violating COVID-19 protocols and lockdowns was kept mild.

The police had other challenges too: there was a spurt in cases of cyber-fraud, particularly those relating to online purchases and phishing. The Supreme Court, in pursuance of a suo moto petition, 'In Re: Contagion of Covid-19 Virus in Prisons' (2020), instructed High Courts to decongest prisons in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak by releasing convicts on parole and under-trial prisoners (charged with offences punishable with maximum punishment up to seven years) who were in jail for three months or more on temporary bail. Except for a few instances of criticism here and there, the police received appreciation for its perseverance and sympathy for others.

The situation appears to be more fearful and grimmer this time. With the steep spike in cases in just a fortnight, the number of hospital beds, ICU beds, medical oxygen, and drugs seems to be short of the rising demand. Though the administration is trying its best to diffuse the situation by coordinating with various stakeholders, panic in certain pockets doesn't appear to subside. The role of some mediapersons and social activists needs special mention here as they have kept the hopes alive for many desperate people by extending a helping hand in time.

Another area of concern has been the disposal of bodies by the State authorities as per COVID-19 protocols. This is sometimes delayed due to the limited capacity of cremation grounds. Relatives are not able to bid adieu to their loved ones and perform their last rituals. Their agony is beyond redemption.

Needless to say, apart from healthcare workers of course, the brunt is being faced by the police, whether it is in tackling the menace of people hoarding scarcely available medical products or maintaining public order in front of hospitals. In addition to enforcing lockdowns and maintaining order, the police continue to perform their regular duties as well. In case an apprehended criminal is found COVID-19 positive, he needs to be quarantined before being produced before a magistrate. In heinous offences like murder and rape, arrests cannot be deferred. According to the prevalent jail protocol, criminals are permitted entry only if they test COVID-19 negative.

The probability of policemen who are effecting arrests catching the infection is very high. So, for a policeman, being safe while being on duty is becoming difficult. Many policemen have succumbed to COVID-19 and numerous others are getting infected while helping others. According to a tweet on March 16, 2021 by the Indian Police Foundation, 1,207 security men (including policemen of the State police and Central Armed Police Forces personnel) have died of COVID-19 and more than 2 lakh have been infected. Their families also remain at a higher risk. The scheme of special insurance cover of 50 lakh, notified for the medical fraternity last

year for a limited period of three months, must be revived and extended to all front-line workers (including the police) this time.

The challenges during the second wave of this pandemic have increased manifold. But despite facing various hardships, the police consider themselves fortunate enough to have been entrusted with the solemn duty to serve the needy and poor in difficult times.

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To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

**END**

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