

Kanjhawala a fallout of dismantling PCR patrolling protocol

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Ministry of Home Affairs, to overcome the heat in the Kanjhawala murder case, has recommended suspension of 11 Delhi Police cops for dereliction of duty. This has been on the basis of a report filed by Special Commissioner of Police Shalini Singh. One is sure that the senior police official must have done a thorough job before recommending action. However, one wonders if she mentioned about the role of former Commissioner of Police Rakesh Asthana in dismantling several decades old PCR policing system.

Among the 11 cops suspended, six of them were on PCR duty and five were at a picket on the day of the incident. There have been news reports of the late response by PCRs and the fact that one of the PCR vans had not responded to a call at all. In all, two are sub-inspectors, four assistant sub-inspectors, four head constables and one constable have been suspended. They all belong to Rohini district.

The old timers would ask how come the Police Control Room (PCR) vans be part of the district policing. The PCR cops were supposed to do patrolling independent of the district police, which provided a system of checks and balances, which Asthana in his wisdom decided to dismantle.

The Delhi Police's control room patrolling vans in September 2021 were integrated with police stations ostensibly for better surveillance and to more efficiently attending to law and order issues. Under the then existing system, these vans, also called mobile patrol vans (MPVs), had their own patrol beats, base points and routes under the command of the central police control room (PCR). This merger was expected to boost the force's functioning, including investigation. However, Kanjhawala case has exposed the 'mistake' in dismantling the system of patrol by PCR vans.

Following the merger, over 800 PCR patrol vans got absorbed into police stations. Under the

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new 'decentralised' system, the police stations came to organise patrolling by the PCR vans. The PCR staff, numbering around 5,000, got posted to different police stations. In the process, the check which the independent PCR vans provided over the local police was gone.

Under the previous arrangement, as a call went on number 100, a PCR van arrived on the spot under no time, much ahead of the local police. They left the spot after the personnel from local police reached the spot and took charge of the situation.

Under the current arrangement, it is mandatory that for every PCR call the investigating officer (IO) accompanies the team to the spot. At the spot, the PCR van waits for the IO till he records the statement of the caller. The PCR van has to be on the spot till the procedure is initiated or the matter is sorted out. It then returns to the police station before it leaves to attend to another PCR call.

What has added to the problem is the 'intent' of the local police to not report crime in their files. In earlier times, PCR recorded the incident independent of the local police. On many occasions crime could not be kept by the local police under the wraps as the matter had been recorded by the PCR. This virtually made the PCR act as the eyes and ears of the Police Head Quarters.

However, under the present system, adopted during the tenure of Rakesh Asthana as Delhi Police head, the PCR has become subordinate to the local police and acts only as an arm of the police station. Since Asthana belonged to Gujarat Police and not the Delhi Police, he failed to appreciate the role which the PCR has played in maintaining law and order in the city and more importantly in keeping the local police on its toes.

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