

# Strengthening the Internal Accountability Process in Police: Impediments and Way Forward

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## Abstract

The topic of this research article is “Strengthening the Internal Accountability Process in Police: Impediments and Way Forward”. The objective and purpose of this research is to identify the hurdles involved in internal accountability process of police in order to give recommendations for strengthening the said process. Extensive literature has been reviewed in order to identify gaps involved in the internal accountability process of police. Then, a comprehensive research methodology has been given for carrying out results, analysis and discussion. Lastly, conclusion and recommendations have been given for the police department to improve its internal accountability process.

**Keywords:** *Internal Accountability Process, Internal Accountability Impediments, Pakistan Police Department.*

## 1. Introduction

The Punjab Police Internal Accountability Branch was established in 2018 for this very purpose. This dedicated office within the Punjab Police specializes in performing accountability checks of all police officials serving therein. In order to achieve its full objectives, this or any other such organization must see accountability as a wholesome system resulting in good policing practices – and not just a system that only reacts to a complaint. It should be proactive rather than reactive. It should utilize an IT enabled environment and provide analyses for better decision making,

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especially in utilizing available human resources at the time of posting individual officials. A well laid out and unambiguous code of ethics and integrity standards has to be the corner stone of any internal accountability system. There must be an emphasis on regular training to inculcate a strong value system. The IAB has been in operation since 2018 but has to date failed to create an impact in reduction of complaints or in improving the perception of police image. Whereas timely responses to public complaints can build public confidence in the system, at the same time it must provide deterrence against future nonconform. Only then will the accountability process contribute towards improving the negative perception held by the citizens against the police. The last century has seen the world gradually move towards increasing adoption of democratic norms. This in turn has necessitated the need for greater transparency in institutional procedures. This requirement is ever more pronounced in countries that have inherited institutional frameworks from former colonial rulers. The relationship between the erstwhile colonizers and the colonized subjects had a completely different dynamic than the one that must exist between a democratic state and its subjects. It is from this relationship that all institutional requirements flow. Pakistan acquired its freedom in 1947, but has largely continued to practice the same set of institutional traditions and rules that were left as a legacy by the British.

All past governments, political or otherwise, have had police reforms on the agenda, with internal accountability as a part of it. This is for two reasons. First poor accountability leads to poor policing and secondly, a majority of citizens carry a adverse image of the police. People need policing and they need it in a friendly, cooperative, humane, and sympathetic manner. Even though this issue is high on the agenda of governments at the time of their taking over, their tenures seem to just fly past with little or nothing being achieved. While improvements have been made and new infrastructure, institutions, and job positions created, but if there is one thing that no governments have been able to achieve then that is changing the '*thana*<sup>2</sup> culture' from which flows the negative police image.

Over the past few years, the internal accountability process and procedures in Punjab police have evolved and matured into a formal Internal Accountability Branch (IAB). However, the effectiveness of IAB in transforming the institution into more people-friendly and accountable police has yet to materialize. Public perception of police has hardly changed thus far. So much so, that it is a general perception that the police reforms are merely cosmetic and their efficacy questionable. Police accountability

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<sup>2</sup> Thana is the ubiquitous word for police station in most of South Asia.



has two facets; how police officials perform their functions within the official hierarchy and how they maintain integrity when it comes to dealing with public. The official duties of police in managing affairs of office and reporting to hierarchy is the convenient part of accountability. Officials are trained to act in an apparently disciplined manner and similarly an ostensible check and balance mechanism is also available as part of the police rules. On the other hand, to make officials accountable for misconduct and corruption is not so convenient or easy. The internal accountability aspect of policing in Pakistan's largest province – which if it were an independent country would have been the 10<sup>th</sup> most populous one in the world – is the subject of research of this report.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.1. Problem Statement**

It is a widespread perception that lack of accountability in the Police Department has resulted in incompetence at all levels of police organizations in Pakistan which in turn results in poor service delivery. Serious matters of misuse of authority, such as refusal to register complaints, illegal detentions, misbehaviour with victims, torture and death in police custody do not face the required merits of accountability. It is argued that ineffectiveness of institutional mechanism to hold police accountable is the main reason for this present state.

### **1.2. Significance of the Study**

Responsible policing impacts everyday life of citizens. This research analyses the most common public complaints against the police department and gauges effectiveness of the internal accountability mechanism of police in improving upon these. The report highlights existing rules and regulations which empower the police officials with disciplinary authority at all levels to ensure that police stay accountable for their duties towards public. A way forward for more effective internal accountability regime is also suggested. Hence, the report will be useful for police officials interested in joining the accountability branch of the police and also for academic interest of the police officers.

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<sup>3</sup> Under official Government of Pakistan statistics the population of Punjab is just under 128 million in 2023. This places it between Russia (145 million) and Mexico (126 million). [https://www.citypopulation.de/en/pakistan/admin/7\\_punjab/](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/pakistan/admin/7_punjab/)

## 2. Literature Review

Chattha and Ivkovic (2004) explain the role of non-merit-based recruitments as the starting point of corruption in life of a police officer. Not surprisingly, the first task for such a police officer is to recover the costs of recruitment by repaying for the favour incurred through his or her recruitment. They believe that due to the faulty and politically partial recruitment system, most of the members of police force are involved in some type of police misconduct and participants in a mutually beneficial code of silence. They emphasize the importance of ethics and morals in an individual. The contention surely has a merit to it, as it classifies the beginning of the tragedy that a young police recruit has to face.

The Corruption Perception Index, an annual global survey of international integrity watchdog Transparency International, places Pakistan at the 140<sup>th</sup> position among the 180 countries surveyed; in this perception survey, 41.1% respondents have opined Pakistan police as the most corrupt department. At the same time 51.9% have indicated that the cause of corruption is weak accountability (Transparency International, 2021).

Klitgaard (1999) coined the 'formula for corruption' in his well regarded 1999 speech at the Carter Centre Conference, "Corruption equals Monopoly plus Discretion minus Accountability". This equation shows how accountability is the only factor that can nullify the tendency of misuse of authority and discretion. But accountability is not only about corruption, it is also a performance audit of organizations, especially in the public sector. To make public officials accountable for performing their duties to the best of their individual abilities and knowledge as well as organizational requirements, it is imperative that a system be put in place to effectively audit their collective performance at all levels. This alone can act as a bulwark against the misuse of power and authority by public functionaries.

Shigri (2012) takes a step further back and relates corruption in police as a reflection of the corruption in the society at large. He creates a rather dismal picture of state of affairs and contends that in a sea of corruption it is impossible to create islands of honesty and integrity. As for lack of accountability in police, Shigri blames this primarily on political interference in policing. He contends that internal accountability in police under the command of a person who is an instrument of political manipulation is impossible. As a trickle-down effect, corruption flourishes in the rank and file of police establishment.

Lyon expands the above idea of social interference and expands upon it as a natural adjunct of relationships between power and patronage in Pakistani society. In his doctoral thesis he presents how power is expressed,



accumulated and maintained in three social contexts: kinship, caste and political relationships. Socialization within Pakistani kinship groups provides the building blocks for asymmetrical relationships, which helps understand the culture of patronage. In such a society politicians make deals and alliances which are not based on ideology or policy but rather on political survival. They protect people who support them, and, in turn, they expect to be supported by those whom they have supported (Lyon, 2004).

Malik and Qureshi (2021) present a qualitative study using a purposive sampling method to draw a correlation between economics, culture, and politics with police corruption in Pakistan. The police force is entrenched in a kinship-based patron-client social and political culture that benefits elite which uses the police for controlling the electorate and political opponents. They conclude that the structure of the state is dominated by the moral economy linked to patron-client politics where police officials facing economic hardships are patronized by politicians to quell the opposition and control people in their constituencies.

### **2.1. Research Objective:**

The police is responsible for protecting life and property of citizens as well as maintaining law and order in all areas under its jurisdiction. In order to effectively deliver these objectives, they must not only enforce the law but also prevent, detect, and investigate criminal activities. Due to the very nature of its duties, police is equipped to exercise immense power and authority. It is this power that has often been blamed as a root cause of misconduct, high handedness, and corruption of its members.

### **2.2. Research Question:**

The question that arises is, "Is there an institutionalized system of internal accountability in the police department?" Other questions are, "If there is such a system, then to what extent has this system been effective in making the police more accountable? And "What are the impediments in strengthening the internal accountability mechanism in police?"

### **2.3. Scope of the Study:**

The scope is limited to studying and analysing legal and institutional frameworks of internal accountability mechanism in Punjab police. The effectiveness of system is gauged in addressing complaints of non-registration of incidence reports (FIR), defective or partiality in investigations, seeking illegal gratification and police high handedness.

## 2.4. Conceptualizing Internal Accountability

### 2.4.1. The Quranic concept of accountability

The word *hisāb* is mentioned multiple times in the Noble Qur'an; the word literally means "account" and relates to the believers' obligation to account for their deeds to Allah (God) on all matters for which every Muslim is accountable. The Noble Qur'an states

"يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْتَنْظُرْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ."

O you who believe! Be conscious of Allah, and let every soul consider what it has forwarded for the morrow, The Day of Judgement, and be conscious of Allah. Allah is aware of what you do. Surah: 59, Verse: 18

Allah (swt) repeatedly reminds and warns us that one day we shall be standing before Allah for our accountability for performing *ma'ruf*: [مَعْرُوف] (virtuous and good) and refraining from *munkar* [مُنْكَر] (evil and bad)

"وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَنْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ."

And advocate righteousness and forbid the evil. Surah: 31, Verse: 17.

### 2.4.2. Modern democratic concept of accountability

Accountability has not been assigned a single agreed definition and as such the meaning is defined in various ways in different dictionaries (Tripathi, 2016). Oxford English Dictionary defines the word accountability as derived from the Latin word '*accomptare*' that means 'to account', a prefixed form of '*computare*' which means 'to calculate', which itself is derived from '*putare*' that means 'to reckon' (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). However, there is no agreement towards its origins either. Some believe it originated in Babylon while others believe it is Greek and yet more say it is rooted in Egypt. A good definition of accountability in modern democratic context is equated with answerability, blameworthiness, liability, and the expectation of account-giving (Dykstra, 1939).

Every public official must be held accountable for duties assigned and at the same time also accountable for any excesses committed in the performance of such duties. A good system entails that the official will report the duties performed and take responsibility for these (The Law Dictionary, n.d.). Such accountability is an obligation and not a matter of choice (Mulgan, 2002). In this way the accountability is also about self-ownership of one's actions.



### 2.4.3. Need for Accountability

Civic and Michael (2011) discuss the concept in terms of Max Weber's concept of states' monopoly over the legitimate use of force and go on to explain how the state then delegates the authority to institutions such as police. By virtue of this model, the police acquires both the duty and the means to maintain public law and order and prevent, detect, and manage crime. These means include legally allowed powers to arrest and detain errant citizens. Exercising such authority without appropriate check and balance only breeds a creed of corruption and lust for more power. With the rise of modern nation states the need for such institutional setups is deemed essential. Hence, democratic norms of modern nation states require a concomitant need for transparency in the affairs of state institutions especially the ones wielding so much power and authority. Wherever the state accountability setup is weak, officials have used their authority for personal gains.

Accountability is not just for the actions taken by officials that are contrary to the law or the excesses committed officials during discharge of duties, it is also for omissions in the mandate of duty and required actions that have not been fulfilled. In this manner, making officials accountable for their duties requires a multi-pronged approach. The excesses or misuse of authority committed by officials which involve maltreatment of citizens or cause losses to them often come to light through complaints, being highlighted in the media or by way of being an independent application filed for redress in a court. The omissions in duty, such as maintenance and management of the police record, on the other hand will not be reported and complained against by any external elements, so a system of internal control is imperative

### 2.4.4. Types of Accountability

Accountability of public office holders is broadly categorized as either internal or external accountability. It has long been argued that public office holders cannot be held accountable for their actions by their own fellow officers, so an external oversight agency is an essential requirement. This argument is based on the concept of the 'Blue Wall of Silence'. In recent times many researchers have placed considered emphasis on the horizontally and vertically integrated internal accountability regimes within the departments.

#### 2.4.4.1. External Accountability

External accountability, as the term suggests, comprises oversight mechanisms which lie beyond the legal and physical authority of the department being held accountable for. This has many forms prevalent in

the world: Executive Control by higher sanctioning body, judicial oversight by judges and prosecutors, parliamentary oversight by legislators and elected representatives of people, independent oversight by bodies of notable citizens tasked with such a function against police performance and behaviour (UNODC, [n.d](#)). And finally there are civil society and media which provide an informal accountability check by constantly exposing shortcomings in police performance as well as exposing their high handedness and excesses.

In Pakistan, Police Order 2002 also provides for developing an external oversight agency for police – the Police Complaints Commission. It is argued that external accountability by an oversight body not connected with the police system is more potent as the likelihood of partisan decisions is low. External accountability has certain merits that cannot be provided within the internal accountability framework. In fact, in certain cases where senior police officials are to be made accountable, external accountability may be the only viable option.

#### *2.4.4.2. Internal Accountability*

Internal accountability, as the term suggests, means that officials of the department are held accountable for their actions by the superior hierarchy within the department. This is a standard practice all over the world with police departments to have a dedicated branch within the police hierarchy to deal with internal accountability matters only. The operating procedures for the internal affairs or internal accountability offices have evolved over the years and are now standardized all over the world. A good system allows for maximum effectiveness of the accountability regime and at the same time checking the authority and discretion of the officials of the accountability office. Unlike an external accountability regime, which is more reactionary in nature, internal accountability is supposed to be proactive in nature. A constantly operating mechanism which has no other purpose but to follow its procedures day in and day out to perform accountability checks and balances within the department. This round the clock exercise automatically creates an air of vigilance and transparency throughout the department.

Internal accountability also has its weaknesses and threats. The system only works if right people can be selected for the job and the system is allowed to operate without any political or intra-departmental pressures. In our highly politicized system, this is often very difficult and therefore lapses keep threatening the system. Indeed, if impartiality cannot be guaranteed then the external mechanism will soon take over.

The scope and effectiveness of internal accountability is much more widely accepted due to its broad based and proactive approach. Key



elements of accountability are listed here;

- a. A formal mechanism with standard operating procedures (SOPs) is the hall mark of the internal accountability department
- b. Collection and analysis of data regarding complaints, omissions, lapses by officers
- c. Pre-empting behaviours and issuance of advisory regarding postings of officers

## **2.5. Internal Accountability in Punjab Police**

Punjab Police comprises 190,000 personnel inclusive of all ranks. These officials are scattered in geographic jurisdiction comprising 205,344 square kilometres (Government of the Punjab, n.d.) This makes it the largest police organization in Pakistan which is spread over a large area. Immediately after the independence of Pakistan, police organizations in Pakistan adopted the pre-Partition Police Rules of 1934 which were implemented by the British in the sub-continent. Chapter 15 and 16 of the police rules dealt with a system of rewards and punishment which to a great extent was the internal accountability mechanism available to police at that time. In 1975 Punjab Police Discipline and Efficiency Rules were approved to deal with the police officials from grade 1 to 16 whereas the officers in grades 17 and above were to be dealt with under the Police Rules of 1934. The 1975 rules comprised a more comprehensive set than the one's provided by system of rewards and punishment under Police Rules of 1934. In 1999 Punjab Civil Servants Efficiency and Discipline Rules were finally approved to deal with officers in grades 17 and above. Police Order 2002 provides for creation of 'Public Safety Commissions' as an external accountability oversight body.

Police Order 2002 for the first time provided for organizing provincial police into functional branches. The accountability branch is described in Chapter 8 of the Police Order 2002 (Punjab Code, 2002). The Police Order provides for the creation of Provincial Public Safety [and Police Complaints] Commission and gives the criteria for the selection of members. It also lists various functions expected from the PPSC including cognizance of cases of police neglect, excess, abuse of authority and conduct prejudicial to public interest should the PPSC receive a complaint from aggrieved party. PPSC can directly assign the inquiry and also recommend disciplinary action if the alleged charges are proven to be true. The Police Order clearly shows the necessity and urgency for creation of a police accountability setup. According to police officials the PPSC is yet to be materialized.

In order to have a single set of rules for all ranks, Punjab Police submitted a draft of Efficiency Rules 2015, which are yet to be approved. In 2016, Punjab Police established the first of its kind independent, dedicated and full-time internal accountability wing with the title 'Discipline and Inspection Branch' -D & I Branch (Office of the Inspector General of Police, 2016).

## **2.6. Punjab Police Internal Accountability Branch**

Punjab Police Discipline and Inspections branch was redesigned into Punjab Police Internal Accountability Branch in 2018 in the (Office of the Inspector General of Police, 2018). The earlier D&I branch not only lacked comprehensive coverage and SOPs, it did not have enough geographic reach and was mostly reliant on responses from the districts. Today the IAB has physical presence at the provincial and regional levels. At the provincial level, the branch is headed by no less than an officer the rank of Additional Inspector General of Police.

### **2.6.1. Setup of the Internal Accountability Branch**

Punjab Police IAB is functionally divided into three separate wings at the provincial level which deal with inspections, performance evaluations and complaints respectively. Each wing is headed by a grade 19 officer called Assistant to Inspector General of Police (AIG) of the respective wing. IAB also has presence in all the divisional headquarters to cover the length and breadth of Punjab.

The Inspection Wing, as the title implies, deals with inspections of various police offices. As per Police Rules, these are both formal and informal inspections. Formal inspections are scheduled and conveyed and reports on set format are generated after the inspection. Inspections are very important since police stations and their supervisory offices constantly generate huge amounts of information. Police station records comprise multiple interlinked registers (now electronic databases) which must be synced properly in order to maintain sanctity of the data and to fulfil the legal requirements. One of these registers, the daily diary, is very active for any urban police station. Even though maintaining this record is a tedious job, mistakes and omissions are not tolerated. This is the importance of inspection. Poor maintenance of record reflects poorly on the police Station House Officer (SHO) who is accordingly penalized.

Complaint's branch, as the name suggests, deals with public complaints made against police officials. Citizens can file complaints from anywhere in Punjab, through any one of the available means advertised widely including phone 8787, mail, or by physically appearing before IGP



complaint cell.

The Enquiries Wing conducts enquiries assigned by the IGP or by the Addl. IG IAB. The assignment of the enquiry is made by the IGP to officers of IAB. Inspector General of Police Punjab has ensured that most competent officers under his command are assigned enquiry matters. Dedicated officers have been deputed for the purpose. It is claimed that impartiality towards enquiries is ensured by assigning officers who do not belong to the same regional police hierarchy. IAB formulates police accountability policy and monitors its implementation to protect the public, employees, and the department through fair, thorough, and pro-active enquiries and proceedings against alleged misconduct of police officials. IAB streamlines processes and enquires into internal and external complaints against police officers (from constable to DIG) from various authorities, private complaints, and other sources including social media. IAB has devised a mechanism for timely disposal of public complaints and enquiries and maintains a track record of the same. IAB maintains a database of enquiries and suggests enhancement of punishment where departmental action/punishment awarded doesn't commensurate with the misconduct.

### **2.6.2. Complaint Redressal SOP**

All complaints are entered into a complaint recording (digital) system. The complainant is provided the ID of the complaint and he or she can view the status on-line and provide feedback. Once lodged into the system the complaint is forwarded to the SSP/AIG in order to be assigned to an enquiry officer of BS-17. The enquiry officer will contact the complainant within eight (8) hours. The enquiry must be completed within the provided benchmark times. These are: two weeks complaints against demands of a bribe; 48 hours for burking or non-registration of cases and arrests of innocent persons. For all other complaints, the enquiry is to be completed within two weeks.

### **2.7. Research Gap**

It is not sufficient for a state to simply hold out a promise and verbalize its commitment to put in place institutions responsible for protecting the life and liberty of its citizens, but it is essential that the state also designs and implements internal mechanisms within these institutions that can ensure effectiveness of service delivery, transparency and accountability while providing these services.

In the absence of effective accountability, this responsibility has always been seen as missing and not surprisingly has been a source of severe criticism against the state. Everyday policing functions are carried out mostly in the field to address all manner of crime and law order

management situations. In the absence of direct supervision of a large and scattered force that holds significant authority on behalf of the state, it is essential that strong mechanisms be in place to stand police personnel accountable for performing their duties. Simultaneously, a transparent complaint reporting mechanism for the public with which the police deals must also be in place.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This research uses primary sources including interviews of serving police officers who are dealing with internal accountability in Punjab police as well as retired police officials who have dealt with internal accountability in Punjab police in the past. Primary data sources also include raw data provided by the Punjab police department and their official records which they have shared and allowed for publication. Reliance has also been made on secondary sources including official data and documentation of police department, books, articles, reports and publications by local and authors who have written on the issue around the world.

#### **3.1. Research Analysis**

IAB Punjab deals with three different aspects of police functions: police station record inspections complaints' management, and handling of enquiries. This article focuses on the analyses of complaints made against the police and results of enquiries.

Analysis in the following sections shows compilation of complaints handling data from the Complaints Cell in the IGP office and the results of the enquiries conducted by the IAB.

The data presents performance of the IAB in handling complaints made against police in four of the most common complaint heads taken from (Government of Punjab, n.d). It is pertinent to mention here that the following four categories alone comprise of 75% of all the complaints received against the police officers which were 125000 for the year 2021. The punishments awarded are bifurcated as major awards and minor awards. Major punishments under the rules include dismissal from service, removal from service, compulsory retirement, forfeiture of approved service, reduction in rank and recovery from pay or pension. Minor punishments include censure letter, extra drill, fine, withholding of promotion and withholding of increment.

Data received through IAB indicates that bulk of complaints are received under the head of burking or refusal to register a case on the applications made by the complainants. This is 77% for 2021 and 79% for 2020. This is also an area which is most notorious and highlighted by the media. It is also



most painful when a victim is told that the case cannot be registered upon receipt of the application. Interviews with the officials give a clear picture of their understanding of the issue. Perhaps it is as clear as the day light to each one of them that police stations are somehow not shedding the practice of burking. There are certain dynamics that came to light during the interview that must be presented here.

**Table 1**

*Complaints against practice of Burking or Non-Registration of Police Case*

Year	Complaints Received	Complaints Dropped	Decided	Punishments Awarded	
				Major	Minor
2021	72416	72021	384	26	358
2022	70694	70192	502	58	444

*Note:* Decision of complaints in 2021-22 (Government of Punjab, n.d).

### **3.2. Unusual Sanctity to the FIR**

Even though FIR is just an incident report, it is considered the first evidence by the police officers to start the investigation. It is a well-known fact that police discourage registration of FIR without nominated accused. Due to the authority of the police station officials and the unusually hyped sanctity attached with the FIR, police station officers find themselves in a convenient position to assert their influence over victims who approach police stations for registration of FIR. This either turns out to be a customized statement from the victim when accompanied by financial gratification or merely the start of the investigation.

Burking is the outcome of an unusually hyped value of the FIR and the discretion exercised by police station house officers which leaves plenty of room for rent seeking. There are mostly two parties involved in matters relating to crime. As a result, the police station staff acting in connivance with the accused party in the FIR puts pressure on the complainant to either change the wording of the FIR or to exclude the names of certain individuals or simply refuses to register the FIR. In even worst cases, they register a 'reverse FIR' by seeking an application from the accused party.

### **3.3. Registered Crime as a Performance Criteria**

Another reason why police station staff is seen discouraging or denying registration of FIR is the fact that the number of registered crimes in police stations is considered a performance measurement for the police station officials. In this correlation, the higher the reported and registered incidents of crime, the poorer the performance of the police station officials and the vice versa. With the authority and influence that police station house

officers exercise they can conveniently deny the registration of FIR report or delay it on one pretext or the other. If nothing else works, he or she can simply take an excuse that the incident requires verification. Burking is the most convenient method to show immediate performance in crime management. Senior police officials know that the practice is most widely prevalent in our police system, but have never been able to achieve any successful countering measure. No serious punitive measures are taken in order to discourage the widely prevalent exercise. If there is one practice that is largely responsible poor image that the people have of the police, it is refusal to register incident reports or convert these into FIRs.

Just by looking at the figures of complaints one can see that 77% of the volume of all the complaints are made against non-registration of cases. The failure of accountability is also indicated in decisions against these complaints. Only 384 out of 72,416 were awarded punishment. This is just one half of one percentage point. The reasons provided vary from official to official. Some argue that the majority complaints end up without result as these are frivolous and have no merit. There are also anonymous complaints which the police is not obliged to entertain. Others have argued that if police stations register cases immediately upon the first attempt and complainants never shows up when called subsequently, the need to enquire evaporates. The complainant cannot be blamed either because the case is now registered or he or she knows it will be investigated in the same police station, so the complainant either out of courtesy or fear never follows up on the complaint. Analysis of the data provided by the IAB indicates that failure of the accountability process might be responsible for persistence of this exercise.

**Table 2**

*Complaints against Poor or Faulty Investigation by Police Investigation Officers*

Year	Complaints Received	Complaints Dropped	Decided	Punishments Awarded	
				Major	Minor
2021	6183	3687	2496	277	2219
2022	4356	1399	2957	311	2646

*Note:* Decision of complaints in 2021-22 (Government of Punjab, [n.d.](#)).

One of the new professional policing aspects introduced by the Police Order 2002 was separation of the investigation and operations wing at the police station level. The scheme was initially implemented with effort made to ensure its sanctity as envisioned in the new law. But soon it was felt that



the scheme undermined the authority of officers in-charge of the police station. It is this authority and discretion that gives them immense powers not only to have their presence felt but also to sway the political and social opinion in the local area. Professional career-oriented skills of investigation officers have never developed due to lack of this implementation of Police Order 2002 provision.

Data provided by the IAB suggests that out of the 6183 complaints received against officials about defective investigation, only in 4.5% complaints the officials have been awarded major punishment and 36% have received minor punishment. The data also indicates that there has been a 40% increase in complaints about faulty investigation. The rise in the complaints indicates that the quality of investigation or satisfaction of the complainant towards the quality of investigation has deteriorated. The fact that only in only 4.5% of the complaints the investigation officers have received meaningful punishment also indicates that perhaps this has not proved sufficient deterrence against intentional or unintentional poor quality of investigation.

A reason provided by the senior police management is that due to the reach of social media down to all levels in masses, the expectations have been raised. People expect high level of expertise and technical investigation tools to be utilized even in most minor offence cases. Utilizing cellular triangulation or call data and geo-fencing techniques is only done for heinous offence cases since these techniques require high level of expertise and resources, but cannot be utilized for everyday phone snatching, bike snatching or other street crimes. Such explanation from police may seem logical from the police point of view, but for a victim of bike snatching, the bike is perhaps the most expensive possession that he or she has lost.

An analysis of a subset of the complaints indicates that the majority of these complainants have attributed defects in the investigations to wilful connivance of the investigation officers with the accused parties. The complainants accuse investigation officers of not collecting or not presenting the evidence, willfully substituting or destroying the evidence, willfully using language that leads to giving benefit of doubt to the accused, not arresting the nominated accused or all of the nominated accused, presenting weak or no evidence and allowing bail to be granted the accused. Almost all such complaints also accuse the investigation officer of receiving illegal financial 'compensation' from the accused parties in order to deliberately undertake a weak or faulty investigation.

**Table 3**

*Complaints against Bribery, Financial Gratification, and Corruption in Police Stations*

Year	Complaints Received	Complaints Dropped	Decided	Punishments Awarded	
				Major	Minor
2021	10466	9476	990	454	536
2022	7971	7066	905	435	470

*Note:* Decision of complaints in 2021-22 (Government of Punjab, n.d.).

Another complaint head which is responsible for a significant number of complaints against police station officials is their seeking bribes or financial gratification. These complaints are made by the victims of incidents who feel insecure by the high-handed treatment at the hands of police station staff. The complainants either assume or receive indication that the police officials have begun colluding with the accused parties, or they are told by someone at the police station to 'create an incentive' or make a 'compensation offer'. There are recorded incidents where complainants have reported being asked for offering financial gratification in order to register FIR or proceed with investigation or the arrest of the accused in the FIR.

The matter of police investigation officer having received financial compensation from a bonafide victim or complainant in a case is yet another matter. In this case the complaint of illegal gratification against a police investigation officer is made by the perpetrator of a crime. Since the evidence against the accused is already on file, the complaint, even if the allegations made against the police official may have some truth the same is most likely to be filed. Such is the difficulty of proving complaints of illegal gratifications against police.

The certainty and severity of punishment both seem to be missing after analysing the data provided by the IAB. The data indicates that out of all the complaints received in all the four categories, less than 5% actually were awarded a punishment with only 1% awarded a major punishment. Of the complaints received against financial corruption at the police stations, the major punishment award ratio is just 4% of the complaints received. The situation is not encouraging at all and speaks of the prevailing culture and poorly perceived image of police in the eyes of public. Much has been written about this evil in global literature. The primary factor responsible here is again the failure of accountability.



**Table 4**  
*Complaints against Police High Handedness*

Year	Complaints Received	Complaints Dropped	Decided	Punishments Awarded	
				Major	Minor
2021	4979	4271	708	222	486
2022	5856	5142	714	334	380

*Note:* Decision of complaints in 2021-22 (Government of Punjab, [n.d.](#)).

High handedness of police is a very wide ranging term and comprises all manner of activities where a police official comes in direct contact with a citizen but fails to demonstrate an acceptable demeanour, courtesy or welcoming and cooperative attitude. Such conduct may happen when a citizen approaches a police official in a police station in order to lodge an incident report or on a street to seek a nonspecific help or during a public law and order matter. Complaints of high handedness are usually accompanied with other specific grievances against police officials which often include one of the above three stated complaint heads. Data provided by the IAB for complaints of other non-specific police high handedness indicates that out of the 4979 complaints received in 2021 under this head, only 14% were decided for award of punishments. The data also indicates that the police high handedness complaints have seen reduction in volume.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1. Identifying the Impediments

Whether it is the lack of effective internal accountability that encourages corrupt practices or it is corruption that leads to an ineffective accountability regime, there are a number of challenges which need further discussion. There are challenges to the efficiency and performance of the IAB that are internal as well as challenges that the police administration faces in general which hamper the overall control of the police administration. Ultimately these affect the accountability mechanisms. Such challenges include external influencing such as political, social and economic. There are also issues associated with internal weaknesses within the accountability mechanism of the police.

Police behaviour in Pakistan has evolved in the context of socioeconomic and political circumstances, which have culminated with the present crisis of 'police misconduct (Chattha & Ivkovic, [2004](#)). Currently, the IAB system may at best be considered at a nascent stage, considering that even in developed countries police accountability is equally challenging for policy makers. In UK, for instance despite the intricate accountability regime with

its checks and balances and separation of powers, police accountability has always been and remains a contentious issue of public and political debate (Mawby & Wright, 2005).

## **5. External Factors Impeding Accountability Outcome in Punjab Police**

### **5.1. Politicization in Police Department**

Pakistan inherited its governance structure and institutions from its British colonial rulers. British governance relied heavily on the support of local influential elite in order to run its administrative apparatus smoothly. The police was for long used through the loyal landed aristocracy to suppress any public dissent against the British (Verma, 2005). For this purpose police enjoyed unlimited authority over people. This mutual relationship (even, collusion) of the police and the local political and landed elite thus has a long history in sub-continent. Although the British have long gone, legacy politics and culture of state patronage is very much intact and thriving even today. The landed elite still enjoy similar influence as was enjoyed under the patronage of British rulers.

Political interference or politicization of the police department is one of the elements that has a deep impact on police accountability. Local politicians are aware of the coercive authority that district level or tehsil (sub-divisional) level police officers hold. Political patronage leads to posting of 'friendly' police officials in districts and tehsils who will be beneficial to the interests of the politicians. These police officials then become a big support to their politician-friends and often turn a blind eye towards excesses committed by junior police officials at the behest of their political patrons or directly by them against their opponents. Corruption thrives in such an environment, in which police are used as an instrument of suppression rather than as a service to people (Shigri, 2012). If these police officials do get into trouble for their unwarranted excesses, it is again their political masters who come to their rescue and who use political pressure in getting enquiries dropped or have their impact diluted by way of award of minor punishments. Thus the entire accountability mechanism is undermined.

During one interview a police official disclosed that another police officer was awarded the maximum penalty of dismissal from service, but he later found him on duty in another district. When asked about his punishment, he replied that he made an appeal to police high-ups and the charges against him were dropped. This influence of politicians over police has serious consequences towards genuineness of accountability process (Chattha & Ivkovic, 2004). This unholy alliance is extremely prevalent. A police official posted in the field receives daily calls from local politicians



asking for advice on an ongoing investigation, an inquiry or a posting assignment to be given to police employees. There have been many instances where officials as senior as District Police Officers have been posted out simply for their noncompliance towards the local political leadership. Command level officers are often chosen on the basis of their willingness to comply with illegal orders, flout the law, or harass political opponents (Shigri, 2012).

Over the last two decades, this association between the politicians and the bureaucrats has almost achieved a status of an informal fraternity. The officers are now labelled based on their deep relationship and loyalty with a certain political party. So much so that they do not consider it as something essentially bad, but rather as something acceptable as part of the prevalent bureaucratic and national cultural norm. A similar grouping also exists within the police and civil bureaucracy which is typically called cronyism (Khatri & Tsang, 2016). Each officer posted to a key senior assignment as a result of political patronage creates his own space of influence, in which the parameters of functioning do not involve normal laws and rules, but rather the will of the political patron (Shigri, 2012).

## **5.2. Economic Impediments**

The lower ranked police officials, like all other public sector employees of their rank, work on low salaries. This includes the lower subordinates (grade 1 to 15) who unlike the gazetted officers above grades 16 do not get any other resources or perks of employment. UNDP poverty index reveals that 4 out of 10 Pakistanis live in multidimensional poverty. Oxford Poverty and Human Development Index (OPHI) (2016). Under these circumstances the lack of personal finances is a big incentive towards indulging in corruption. According to the IGP office, monthly take home of a police constable is Rs. 50,000 and that of a Sub-Inspector is Rs. 91,000. This should be compared with the optimal cost of living in Pakistan for a family of four being Rs. 310,611 (Expatistan, n.d.). Non gazetted officers typically do not get family residential quarters, or even bachelor quarters. At present-day inflation of 24.9% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022) which is an official figure, surviving on salary alone is very difficult, if not impossible. Low salaries and lack of health care and fulfillment of basic needs keeps police officers depressed and disturbed (Chattha & Ivkovic, 2004). One does not have to be a sociologist to understand that the poor wages and high cost of living leaves the police officials with a very difficult predicament.

## **5.3. Social and Cultural Pressures**

Whereas the factors mentioned in the preceding paragraphs can be overcome by political will of the government, the elements of social and cultural norms are much more difficult to wish away. Socialisation within

kin groups provides the building blocks for asymmetrical power relationships in Pakistan, which may be easily understood as a form of patron-client linkages. Traditional social groups like castes and tribes serve as vertical patronage organization; these include the terms *qaum*, *zat*, *rishaidar*, *baradari*, *sharika* (Lyon, 2004). There is an intrinsic and deep-rooted culture of associations by way of kinship (*zaat*, *biradari*, '*qaum*', tribes, castes, and race) throughout Pakistan. There is another level of cultural association amongst the people defined as the patron-client linkage of the feudal lord (*wadera* or *zamindar*) and the peasant (*muzaira* or *hari*). Whereas the first type of linkage is in the nature of a free association where mutual obligations are served towards each other, the second association is one of a uni-directional obligation of the peasant towards the feudal.

The police force is entrenched in a kinship-based patron-client linkage from which flow social and political culture benefits; the political elite thus use the police force for controlling the electorate and checking their political opponents (Malik & Qureshi, 2021). In order to understand the impact of this cultural ethos on police accountability, one must understand the patronage the police officials hold among their own kin or the allegiance that a peasant owes to a feudal. A police official with a certain kinship or *qaum* is obliged to help out his fellow tribesman who may be under an enquiry. The same, or even stronger, is the case where an educated *muzaira* who has gone on to hold a police office receives a call from his *wadera* to help out in an enquiry.

## **6. Internal Factors Impeding Accountability within Punjab Police**

### **6.1. FIR and Crime Management Performance Criteria**

Interviews with the senior police officials have revealed that in the absence of real material evidence, investigation and prosecution of crimes rely heavily on the wording and indications made in the FIR. In other words, it is taken as additional evidence if the names of the perpetrators have been indicated in the FIR. So much so, the police station staff is occasionally found directing the victim to put names of any possible or likely perpetrators in the FIR even when the complainant making the report has no clue. Senior police officials interviewed agree that attaching such a sanctity to the FIR gives rise to maximum number of complaints against the police and is a major source of bringing a bad name to the department, but when interviewed they also failed in providing a way out of this dilemma. It is agreed that this requires training and inculcating an understanding in the staff that investigation and prosecution staff need to bring more material evidence rather than just relying on the statement of the FIR.



Another widely prevalent exercise in Pakistani police is the use of crime incident registration figures as a performance indicator. The practice encourages the police station officers to refuse registration of FIRs. It is generally accepted that higher the reported and registered incidents of crime, the poorer the performance of the police station officials and the vice versa. It would be more logical to associate the performance of the police station staff with the investigation output in which there is greater emphasis on the rise and fall of collective incident reports while gauging their performance. The present flawed system may be easy, quick and convenient, but it is a very deceptive means to assess the effectiveness of police officials and their crime fighting abilities.

### 6.1.1. Missing emphasis on Ethics and Professional Standards and Psychological Profiling

Senior Police officials agree and indicate that the rules of business and the training of the police ranks does not place much emphasis on ethical practices and minimum professional standards to be displayed by all ranks on duty, whether attending to an incident or otherwise. It is indicated that lack of unambiguous standards and minimum ethical standards is an impediment for self-accountability among officers.

Psychological profiling is only carried out while posting officials on certain specific assignments, but it is not exercised at large. Moreover there is no emphasis on this during recruitment or training. Hence if a person with psychological issues gets assigned to a public law and order duty or to act as the face of the police station on front desk, this impacts the police image negatively. This also impacts IAB performance directly when such a person gets assigned to handle complaints under the IAB setup.

### 6.1.2. Weak Performance Audit System

There is disconnect between the electronically preserved data about the force and the annual performance evaluation system (PER). There is also disconnect between the performance evaluation mechanism for the lower and upper level sub-ordinate officials. There is yet again difference between the performance evaluation mechanism of upper sub-ordinate officials and senior cadres. With the availability of electronically preserved databases about performance of officials, a reform is required so that analyses can be made at the time of promotions and postings of officers. Not having right persons in the IAB impedes its objectives.

### 6.1.3. Lack of Intervention Mechanism

The IAB claims that over the past three years a comprehensive database is available about the performance of officers of Punjab police as well as complaints and enquiries conducted by the IAB. But there is no Early

Intervention System in place to forewarn about the suitability or otherwise of an officer for certain types of assignments. An EIS is a present-day hallmark of good police organizations around the world. Such a system pre-empts and identifies suitability traits for officers based on recorded evidence throughout their careers. If implemented, an EIS has a potential of reducing public complaints against police.

#### 6.1.4. Lack of Standardized Mechanism for Public Cooperation

There is no standardized system of inviting public cooperation in Pakistani policing. This puts a serious limitation on positive interaction between police and citizens. This attitude of the police results in an unwelcoming atmosphere in police stations and leads to negative criticism from public at large. It is perhaps a lesser understood fact that opening up to fair critique by citizens is a form of accountability in itself. A lot of effort has been made in improving police station atmosphere and making it more amenable to the people, but less has been done on training and character building of the staff. Hence, there has not been much impact on the high handedness of officials and complaints are constantly on the rise.

### 7. Conclusion

Internal accountability is fairly institutionalized in Punjab Police in the form of IAB. High hopes are attached to the newly placed digital complaints registration system and it is anticipated that the mechanism of enquiry through dedicated officers at various levels in Punjab Police will go a long way in improving the overall internal accountability atmosphere in the organization. The IGP Punjab is also taking personal interest in ensuring that enquiries are carried out by most competent officers under his command. IAB in Punjab police claims that a positive impact has been witnessed in all the important areas typically identified in police complaints including non-registration of FIRs, non-arrest of accused, illegal arrests, intentionally flawed investigations, and police high handedness. They base this claim on their trust in what is labelled as a “fool-proof” tracking system checking complaints lodged by complainants on call centre 8787 which ensures taking 100% of complaints to their conclusion. IAB also claims 100 percent satisfaction of complainants in matters relating to non-registration of FIR reports which forms the one major source of complaints.

This report concludes that claims of IAB about success in making police accountable are quite far from truth, at least at the present time. The analysis of complaints data in each of the four complaint heads indicates that the ratio of complaints that get enquired is very small as compared to the number of complaints received in the system. Police officials have given unsatisfactory reasons for this result, including the excuse that not all



the complaints require to be inquired, or that most of these are anonymous or of mundane nature. The ratio of police officials getting punished because of IAB enquiries is miniscule when compared to the actual number of complaints received. This is a failure on part of the present internal accountability system. In the absence of a credible and fool proof system of punishments, the police cannot be made accountable for its actions and provide deterrence to for others acting similarly in the future.

There are external factors influencing police conduct which impede the accountability regime in police, such as political, social and economic. Additionally, there are internal weaknesses within the accountability mechanism of the police. These internal factors include unusual sanctity attributed to FIR, lack of emphasis on ethics and professional standards, absence of psychological profiling of officials, weak performance audit system, lack of an early interventions mechanism, and lack of a standardized mechanism for public cooperation.

In the following section, recommendations are provided as a way forward which may be useful in planning ahead by the IAB.

## **8. Recommendations**

### **8.1. Reducing the Impact of the External Factors**

A change in the overall police working, behaviour and accountability cannot be achieved without this becoming a priority on part of the state and the priority having a matching political will of the government. It is understood that the external factors impacting the policing atmosphere will be the hardest to confront. Factors such as eliminating social and political interference and improving the monetary benefits and living conditions of police have consequences beyond the direct control of even the highest police functionaries. But a conscious effort must always be visible at all levels to counter political interference in recruitments and postings. At the same time no instance of budgetary discussion must be missed to highlight the plight of a police constable. The disparity between the authority attached and the salary structure of a police official must be convincingly put forward and argued for enhancement of police pay and perks.

### **8.2. Need for Unambiguous Professional and Ethical Standards**

Police officials must always be cognizant of the fact they are accountable for each and every action they take while on duty. This not only means their conduct during an ongoing event, but also their demeanour when there is no ongoing incident or event. For this purpose, much still needs to be done in terms of preparation and dissemination of unambiguous professional standards such as guidelines and instructions on arrest and detention procedures to prevent police officers from breaching the law during arrests

(UNODC, [n.d.](#)). Professional standards alone may not be sufficient and must, therefore, be accompanied by strong ethics and integrity standards also. There will be circumstances where police officers face ethical dilemmas such as the tendency for bending certain laws to achieve what they perceive as greater law enforcement objectives (UNODC, [n.d.](#)) or even for personal financial benefit. The lower rank officials belong to an unfortunate class of society which does not have access to neither quality education nor good living habits.

### **8.3. Ease Out the Sanctity Attributed to FIRs**

Rules and procedures which leave room for discretion will always allow room for rent seeking also. Laws regulating registration of FIR, investigation, arrests and detaining should be revisited and standardised to remove discretion. The unnecessary sanctity attributed to the words of the FIR must be removed by framing rules and educating all stakeholders. This must include political leaders, senior police hierarchy, all ranks of police officials, prosecution setup, judiciary, media and public. FIRs must be what they have always meant: First Information Reports. These should be incident reports and may come from anyone - even a by-stander who may report an incident. A fair and impartial investigation may decide the merits of the reports by evaluating the veracity of the reported incident and not favoring either victims or the accused.

Senior police officials as well as political office-holders must also understand crime as a social and economic phenomenon. They must face it together and work out a strategy to better manage it and discourage it. They must help citizens understand its dynamics and provide comfort to citizens who have been victims of crime. But under no circumstance should their words or actions, directly or indirectly, discourage free registration of FIRs.

### **8.4. Improve Performance Evaluation Reporting mechanism**

It is recommended that an internal audit mechanism be developed and legally mandated for regular review of recruitment and training as well as promotion procedures with the sole purpose to qualify their sufficiency in promoting professional and integrity standards. Presently, there are no performance evaluation standards for lower ranks in police. An archaic method of evaluating every action as either a good or a bad entry exists for all lower ranks. This does not leave any room for evaluating the personality and character of police officials. There is no mechanism for regular psychological profiling of constabulary or monitoring their psychological health. For higher ranks a system of Performance Evaluation Reports (PERs) exists, but this too lacks in providing insights into their character and personality attributes. Surprisingly, the present format takes integrity



as a one simple number (on a scale from 1 to 5) rather than covering different aspects to be reported individually with evidence. It is advised that a fresh draft PER be generated by a digital database that could cover the full range of human resource management aspects of police officials and constabulary. This draft PER should list evidence-based performance criteria and incorporate a complaints record collected over the tenures of the officials. The supervisory office may only evaluate the PER based on this evidence rather than giving a very subjective - and hence a partial picture - of officials' performance and character.

### **8.5. Implement Early Intervention System (EIS) in Letter and Spirit**

Much computerization has taken place in the police department and this can be seen at all levels in police offices. This also includes data collection by the complaints management system. Punjab police officials seem proud and happy about the data collected. But this data is not being used optimally for evidence-based decisions. The system should be made to produce meaningful information from the collected data. Databases should provide signals or early warnings for intervention. There's much talk about an Early Intervention System (EIS) but not much is on the ground. If data is recorded properly then that data can help officers to be more proactive. According to the IAB, there exists enough information to characterize an official's personality and work habits to enable senior officials to decide whether the officer under consideration is suitable for a certain type of assignment or not. This is the least such a database must be able to provide. An official who is regularly complained against for his or her propensity towards high handedness must not be assigned any public duty and may be assigned to office work only. Such officials may be selected for psychological evaluation and fitness also. This is how the EIS systems are being utilized all over the world by law enforcement officials.

### **8.6. Remove Opacity and Invite Critique from Community**

Data collected by police should also be made public and analysed in consultation with third party or external experts. Police alone may not be able to identify underlying and systemic causes of misconduct and learn from past failures. It's only natural that staying too long in a same working environment limits the focus of managers and leaders who tend to see intra-organizational issues in a myopic way. An external advice is always good to view issues in a fresh and more critical manner. Opening-up must not be limited to consultants and media, but also to public at large. Police must understand that it will remain on the wrong end of the barrel unless it gets the best part of community on its side. Nothing more will facilitate this than opening-up in the form of a welcoming attitude towards public and being

available to public. Community involvement in policing matters, giving respect, and welcoming criticism with also open hearts. The last aspect will perhaps be the most difficult but also most important. There cannot be any drive for reforming oneself without being open to critique. Such a positive attitude is also the best form of accountability as it allows people and organizations to face responses to their actions from the people who have been affected by those actions.

The fact that a large number of complaints are not being followed up or getting rejected should also be a matter of concern. A comprehensive study must be carried out within the police department itself and also by civil society. Media should play a constructive role in analysing complainants and in seeking to learn why complaints were made in the first place but never followed up. Rejecting a complaint as unfounded or frivolous should not be a decision of a single officer, but be so rejected after due process that involves verification by at least one more officer in the hierarchy. The same should be the case for accepting a complaint.

### **8.7. Publicize Citizens' Rights Due from the Police and Obligations towards Police**

Opaque procedures and working of police have always resulted in officers exercising discretion which in turns always breeds corruption. Unfortunately, very little has been done to disseminate information to citizens about their rights in routine events, including the following:

- I. when they may be approached by a police official,
- II. when they may need to see a police official
- III. when they feel an incident has occurred worth reporting
- IV. what kind of an event or incident is worth reporting?
- V. their rights when a police official seeks information from them
- VI. their rights when a police official requires their presence during an investigation or an enquiry
- VII. their rights should a police official come to arrest them
- VIII. lodging and pursuing a complaint against police
- IX. knowing the difference between a visit or search with/without a judicial warrant etc...

At the same time citizens do not know about their obligations as a citizen. A publicity campaign needs to be launched through social media and the mainstream print and electronic media as well as by way of friendly visits



and lectures in all levels of educational institutions (primary, secondary schools, colleges, universities etc.). It should be inculcated at all levels of police organization that empowering citizens towards their rights is not an act of kindness but an obligatory duty.

### **8.8. Reduce Timelines for Concluding Complaints**

Timelines for handling complaints of certain types need to be revisited and rationalized for a reducing time durations. Presently, the timeline for enquiries relating to matters of burking are to be submitted within 48 hours; this seems too excessive and unjustified. This should be well within 24 hours. The timeline for bribery complaints is two weeks which should be within a week. The timeline for enquiries relating to illegal detention is 48 hours which should be reduced to within 24 hours.

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