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Experts for using police as a main force against terrorism

ISLAMABAD: Speakers at a seminar here on Tuesday said police should be used as a main force in the fight against terrorism.

The seminar, "Countering terrorism and crime: role of police and prosecution" was organised by the Centre for Research and Security Studies at a local hotel.

In his opening remarks, senior journalist Imtiaz Gul said terrorism cases were registered against unknown people and in a few of the incidents police arrested the handlers and facilitators but they were released by courts due to the weak prosecution.

Similarly, the suspects arrested in connection with the 2009 Marriott Hotel attack case were also acquitted. In the terrorism cases, judges mostly remark that the prosecution failed to produce evidence, he added.

Afzal Ali Shigri, a former inspector general of police, said Pakistan was facing widespread terrorism and insurgency and the nation was dealing with enemies who were in the form of targeted groups and challenging the country's unity.

These challenges need to be tackled at all levels: ideological, strategic, technical and developmental. He added that the police had a vital role to play in the scenario.

The police need four major elements to carry out their role: alert, sensitisation, training and communication with the local people.

He said actionable intelligence had emerged recently but the police were still lacking the approach.

He said the police also needed to focus three major areas to counter terrorism: resourcing, reliable transportation and modern means of communication for exchange of information.

"The local population is used as a primary source of information for database and it can also be used for exhausting the sources of enemies," he said. Mr Shigri stressed the need for creating a direct link between the police and the local population for sharing information.

Police should be given proper training to counter terrorism and equipped with latest weapons and security gadgets, he added.

Robert Periot, the author of *Police in War Fighting, Insurgency, Terrorism and Violent Crime*, said the basic function of the police was to protect the population.

It is a face of the government and acts as a belt support for the government. Law enforcement is an effective method for controlling terrorism and police should adopt a proactive role.

Relation and contact with the local population help the police counter terrorism, he said, adding police should also establish good relation with the public by ensure availability, responsibility and professionalism.

Former caretaker law minister Ahmer Bilal Soofi highlighted the role of the prosecution in fighting terrorism and problems faced by it which led to the acquittal of terrorists.

He said implementing international rules of law would ensure all essential elements of an efficient criminal justice system.

He said the use of force by military was a serious issue and was not encouraged but in a continued deteriorating situation there was no other option.

He was of the view that the police recruitments, appointments and promotions should be on merit. A strong legislative support is needed for an effective prosecution service, he said, adding quality of prosecution should be improved and there should be an active support of the government for the department.

During the question-answer session, human rights activist Tahira Abdullah said the police should be given as much significance in all aspects, including budgetary allocations, as the military was being given in the country.

Huma Chughtai said there was a lack of trust among population and oversight of civil society towards the prosecution service.

Countering terror: How to catch militants and impress people

By Our Correspondent

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ISLAMABAD: At a seminar, on Tuesday, on the role of the police in the war on terror, experts called for strengthening the force.

An advocacy campaign for a bottom-up demand for better policing and prosecution was also launched at the event, "Countering Terror and Crime- Role of Police and Prosecution."

Ahmer Bilal Soofi, an expert on international law, said the criminal justice system must be strengthened while stressing on the need to review political support.

Former Sindh IGP Afzal Ali Shigri said Pakistan faced a "complex and difficult security situation due to widespread terrorism and insurgency." While elaborating the role of the police station as a first respondent and a prime source of intelligence for a national database said there was a need to train officials in public relations and service orientation.

” A security plan with the police station as a key component is a necessary for the war against terror

Former Sindh IGP Afzal Ali Shigri

In his recommendations he stressed on the need to build strong linkages between the police station and other organisations to facilitate in transmitting information to the central database in real time. Moreover, a security plan with the police station as a key component was absolutely necessary for the war against terror. "We need to reorient the direction of the police stations and gear them to focus on this battle against a network of terrorists spread far and wide."

Moreover, central intelligence units at the federal and provincial levels need to create that link to benefit from these very important sources of information, he stated. "This will help in gathering hard intelligence about the terrorists, assessments, trends in terrorism, insurgency and their inter-linkage at the national and international levels."

While going for huge investments in anti-terrorism forces and units, it is important that the police station is not neglected, Shigri said. "If we recognise the importance of the police station as a key element in anti-terrorism strategy and integrate it in the plan, the battle would be half- won," he added.

Centre for Research and Strategic Studies (CRSS) Executive Director Imtiaz Gul said cases related to suicide attacks unfortunately lie in cold storage today. Their first information reports were registered against "anonymous" attackers and thus the police couldn't go any further. In the case of a massive bombing in Khyber Bazaar, the police claimed to have arrested the handler, the carrier but the court released all eight offenders for lack of evidence. Gul said that the prosecution routinely fails to produce evidence that can be upheld in a court of law, but at the same time, the police are tainted with allegations of corruption and abuse of authority, their job even more complex in cities such as Karachi and Lahore. They also bear the brunt of politicians and are a target for the terrorists.

Robert Perito, author of "Police in War: Fighting insurgency, Terrorism and Violent Crime," while speaking about the role of the police said, "The police should adopt a proactive role rather than a reactive one."

The project is a collaboration between CRSS and the German agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).