

Gujarat Hardlook: How an exercise to redraw Ahmedabad's three police jurisdictions is expected to solve the jurisdictional puzzle for its residents

To ease the confusion of the residents and reduce the burden of “accountability without responsibility” of police personnel, the boundaries of Ahmedabad city, Ahmedabad Rural, and Gandhinagar have recently been rationalised. Here is how it would impact traffic, VIP movements, and local administration

Picture this: Someone you know gets involved in an accident. The site of the mishap is on a key road passing through the heart of a bustling metropolitan city. You approach the nearest police station, only to be told that the jurisdiction of the area where the accident took place lies with another police station, situated on the city's outskirts several kilometres away.

Or this: You are a resident of an upscale housing society in the city. But although you are part of the same RWA WhatsApp group as your next block neighbour, both of you have to approach different police stations in the event of a burglary or police verification of tenants.

With the boundaries of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) expanding over the years, this was a possibility with a number of roads, circles, and townships in the city as well as the neighbouring Capital of Gandhinagar until very recently.

Earlier this month, though, five years after the boundaries of the AMC expanded to 480.88 square kilometres in 2020, the rationalisation of police jurisdictions was completed.

The process took 18 months of deliberations among the chiefs of three police jurisdictions, governing Ahmedabad — the financial capital of Gujarat, the surrounding rural district, and the administrative capital, Gandhinagar.

The rationalisation of police jurisdictions, at first glance, may appear to be just another delayed bureaucratic exercise but there is a lot more to it. It not only has several elements one would expect to find in international negotiations, such as redrawing of borders and exchanging of enclaves, but is also significant for the people residing in these areas who have traditionally been struggling with overlapping police jurisdictions. The challenges can range from obtaining permissions —from police verification for documents and rental agreements to nod for protests and functions — to emergency related help in the event of an accident, besides traffic management and even road closures for VVIP movement. One of the biggest changes, as per the notifications issued mid-May, is that the Ahmedabad City Police's jurisdiction now covers the entire area within the Sardar Patel Ring Road along with the Ring Road itself apart from service other roads, and all the circles, which are a part of it.

While several outer areas in the north and west have been handed over to Ahmedabad Rural Police, internal areas, earlier controlled by Gandhinagar Police, have been taken from them. Ahmedabad Rural Police and Gandhinagar Police have also exchanged enclaves among themselves.

Though its full effect remains to be seen, for now, several police officers and personnel The Indian Express spoke to believe that the exercise would help ease some of the pressure that came from the confusion around jurisdictions, besides freeing them of the burden of “accountability without responsibility”.

Vaishnodevi Circle: A Microcosm

Perhaps the biggest bone of contention and the most complicated of junctures that needed resolution — a microcosm of the entire issue — was Vaishnodevi Circle. Located at a key juncture with all three police forces — Ahmedabad City, Ahmedabad Rural and Gandhinagar — having some jurisdiction, the circle faced a host of issues, including in terms of police patrolling. Resolving issues that ranged from traffic (the area is a highway) to security (it houses a major temple) besides medico-legal cases coming to the hospital here were major challenges for the officers. The circle is also complicated at ground level with an underpass and an overpass crossing each other at the intersection.

At Vaishnodevi Circle, named after the eponymous temple near it, the SP Ring Road meets the Ahmedabad–Gandhinagar Highway (NH 147). It is built in three levels — a roundabout at the ground level for local traffic, a flyover for vehicles heading towards Gandhinagar, and an underpass for traffic on the SP Ring Road. Add to this mesh of roads the multiple jurisdictions governing them, and one has a complicated situation at hand.

The centre of the circle used to fall under the jurisdiction of Adalaj Police Station (PS) of Gandhinagar, which was 8.2 km away. Now, it has been given to Sola Police Station of Ahmedabad City, at a distance of 5.6 km.

The area north west of the circle, including KD Hospital, which is inside the Ring Road, was under Bopal PS of Ahmedabad Rural, which is 18 km or a 30-minute drive away. It has now been given to Sola PS.

According to the notification, now the jurisdiction of Gandhinagar police will begin after the edge of Vaishnodevi Circle towards the Capital city and will include one-third part of the overpass as well, but no section of the underpass.

Even though the Vaishnodevi Circle itself has wholly been included in the jurisdiction of Ahmedabad City police, it is still divided between two police stations.

The section of the underpass that exits the Vaishnodevi Circle up to Apollo Circle is part of Chandkheda PS while the rest of the underpass, all the way up to Bhadaj circle, is with Sola PS.

For the traffic police personnel from Gandhinagar, having to relinquish this circle came as a relief.

Another case of three overlapping jurisdictions was that of 900-acre Adani Shantigram Township, which was divided between Adalaj, Santej and Bopal police stations. In fact, separate blocks of Water Lily society, located inside Shantigram, were also divided between two police stations. “Since both Bopal PS of Ahmedabad City as well as Santej PS of Gandhinagar are far away, but Adalaj PS is just 10 minutes away, the entire township has now come under the latter’s jurisdiction,” said Gandhinagar SP Ravi Teja Vasamsetty.

Resolution for Ring Road

Around 18 months ago, while the police administration of the three jurisdictions discussed the rationalisation of boundaries, the Gujarat Home Department supported the move. A senior police officer familiar with the developments said, “This proposal is one-and-a-half-year old. Ahmedabad City Police Commissioner GS Malik had chaired a meeting and asked for the stakeholders’ opinion, and it was done on the insistence of Minister of State, Home, Harsh Sanghavi. He felt that people shouldn’t face jurisdictional issues.”

On the ideology change, a prerequisite for this rationalisation, the Superintendent of Police (SP) for Ahmedabad Rural, Om Prakash Jat, said, "The jurisdiction doctrine has changed from survey numbers falling in various areas to defining area markers like the Ring Road, which is now the boundary of the Ahmedabad City Police." In layman terms, earlier, jurisdictions were planned on the basis of specific land survey numbers falling under a particular Revenue Department area. This predisposition has now been changed to allow greater flexibility in terms of changes in the interest of better management.

To better define the limits of the Ahmedabad City Police, the entire SP Ring Road has now been placed under its jurisdiction. This included the annexation of various areas under the Sarkhej, Bodakdev, Sola, Chandkheda, Airport, Naroda and Narol police stations, which include the city outskirts.

Sharing an example, Gandhinagar SP Vasamsetty said, "The survey number of Shree Balaji Wind Park is of Gandhinagar but it is physically located inside the Ring Road (in Ahmedabad). Many residents in the area believed their area fell under Chandkheda PS in Ahmedabad City but they were actually part of Adalaj PS in Gandhinagar. Now, the entire area has been given to Chandkheda PS." Interestingly, the villages of Bhat and Koteshwar, which are inside Ring Road, and were administered by Gandhinagar police, have come under Ahmedabad City Police now.

Similarly, a third major route, the National Expressway 1, also goes through Ahmedabad. The area near its origin point, where it crosses the Ring Road, has now been clearly defined. The road and the overpass till the edge of the Ring Road now fall under Ahmedabad City Police. Further, parts of Shilaj, Makarba and Bopal areas, earlier under the jurisdiction of Sarkhej PS in Ahmedabad City Police, have been given to Bopal PS in Ahmedabad Rural, since they lay beyond the Ring Road. Also, Jetalpur and Chosar villages, earlier under Narol PS of Ahmedabad City, have been given to Aslali PS of Ahmedabad Rural Police.

Tale of three villages

An enclave is a portion of territory completely enclosed by another. An example of this at the international scale is when, in November 2015, a total of 51 erstwhile Bangladeshi enclaves in India and 111 former Indian enclaves in the neighbouring country were physically transferred to each other.

A similar predicament, in terms of police jurisdiction, existed for three villages in Central Gujarat. Bopal PS of Ahmedabad Rural had, within its jurisdiction, the villages of Lapkaman, Khodiyar and Lilapur, situated 16 km, 19 km and 22 km, respectively, away from it. There are several other villages under Gandhinagar Police that lie between Bopal PS and these villages. While Khodiyar and Lilapur villages were added to Adalaj PS, Lapkaman village now falls under Santej PS of Gandhinagar Police.

'Accountability even without responsibility'

One of the major reasons for putting the entire Ring Road under the Ahmedabad City jurisdiction was to manage heavy traffic, coupled with VVIP movement and security bandobast. With some parts of Ring Road falling under Ahmedabad Rural and Gandhinagar, but others under the City Police, conflicts arose in dealing with accidents cases as well.

"There was accountability even without responsibility," said a traffic officer of Ahmedabad City Police, adding, "Due to divided jurisdictions, in the event of accidents or traffic jams, people used to call the Ahmedabad City Police. When told that the issue came under the jurisdiction of the Rural Police, people would think the police are shirking from work. So, when rationalisation was suggested, we decided to accept responsibility for the Ring Road. The commissioner has also agreed to sanction more posts for the city traffic police for the enhanced jurisdiction."

The cross-jurisdiction tended to lead to delayed response time and further distress for accident victims. The disparity in manpower between Ahmedabad City Police and the two other smaller

police forces also played a role in city police subsuming more areas. One of the challenges before the Gandhinagar Police was managing VVIP bandobast. A local officer, whose jurisdiction included parts of the city, said, "We don't have as much manpower as the city (Ahmedabad). We have a constant stream of dignitaries who keep coming to Gandhinagar and they usually have events scheduled in Ahmedabad as well. Having to cover routes even in Ahmedabad city proved to be very challenging. The rationalisation will help ease some of this pressure."

Gujarat is the home state of Prime Minister Narendra Modi while the entire corridor between the two cities, which required the maximum resolution, falls under the Gandhinagar Parliamentary Constituency of Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Ahmedabad City Commissioner of Police (CP) Gyanender Singh Malik spoke to The Indian Express on the impact he hopes this rationalisation will have on the people. "Earlier, there were issues of jurisdiction, especially pertaining to road accidents. People would invariably come to the city police stations. When such cases took place on the outskirts, we had to send them to Bopal or Aslali or to Gandhinagar. People were feeling harassed. That is why we felt the need to get this done for the convenience of the citizens," he said.

On the security issue, Malik said, "During the VVIP bandobast, the issues of coordination arose because in certain spots, you would have jurisdiction of Ahmedabad City, then it would become Rural, then again City, and, in some places, parts of Gandhinagar as well. That is also why we proposed that the entire SP Ring Road and its service lanes be given to Ahmedabad City Police as it is the ideal benchmark to demarcate the city."

After the last expansion of Ahmedabad city in 2020, the city limits stretched from 464 sq km to 480.88 sq km. According to the Urban Development and Urban Housing Department's June 18, 2020 notification, the limits of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation were expanded with inclusion of Bopal-Ghuma area along with village panchayats of Chiloda-Naroda (city) and Kathwada. The Bopal-Ghuma municipality is divided into Sarkhej, Jodhpur, Bodakdev and Thaltej wards.

The AMC limits also included some 150 survey numbers (identifiers for a chunk of government land) such as villages of Sanathal, Visalpur, Aslali, Geratnagar, Bilasiya, Ranasan and Khodiyar — the areas along the Ring Road.

The government notification said "... having regard to the population of the areas, the density of the population therein, the revenue generated for local administration, the percentage of employment in non-agricultural activities and the economic importance of the areas, it is considered necessary to include certain areas in the existing local limits of the Municipal Corporation of the City of Ahmedabad."

The AMC had also demanded inclusion of Zundal, Khoraj, Amiyapur, Sughad and Koteshwar but these were made a part of Gandhinagar Municipal Corporation (GMC). In 2022, plans were floated to include Nandoli village in Kalol taluka of Gandhinagar district, near Shilaj and Bhadaj, under the AMC jurisdiction. However, it still remains on paper, AMC officials stated. Prior to 2020, the expansion was done in 2008 when around 180.01 sq km area was added on the western side of the city and 79.66 sq km area added on the eastern side, taking the total area to 464 sq km. In 2006, municipalities of Bodakdev, Makarba, Nava Odhav, Nikol, Vastrapur, Nava Naroda, Thaltej were included in AMC. Ahmedabad's area remained at 190.84 sq km from 1990 to 2006.

AMC officials said the residents of the villages and gram panchayats initially had inhibitions against being included in Ahmedabad city limits, majorly due to higher property tax and the 40 per cent deduction of plot area for civic services during redevelopment for properties within Town Planning (TP) schemes and the double deduction of 20 per cent applied to gram panchayat areas. However, since inclusion of these areas under AMC, the civic body has been focusing on upgrading infrastructure, including road networks, public transport, water supply, drainage systems, and solid waste management leading to higher allocation of budget each year.

Additionally, social infrastructure is also being upgraded with the inclusion of schools, anganwadi centres, health centres, swimming pools, libraries, gymnasiums, gardens and parks among others.