

# Terrorism war pushes up crime graph

By Kamal Siddiqi

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Despite the disproportionately high police presence in Clifton and Defence, the spate of robberies in these areas has risen spectacularly over the past few months. Many say that this is as a result of, not in spite of the police numbers. One such resident, a retired army officer, says that he was sure that the dacoits that entered his house last month were connected to some security apparatus. One explanation can be security guards.

One of the fastest growing businesses for the past many years has been that of security agencies. Ikram Sehgal, the head of one of the largest such agencies, estimates that in Karachi alone there are about 60,000 private security guards employed by what he calls legitimate private security agencies. On top of this, there are over 15,000 that belong to unregistered security agencies. The guards that work for such agencies do not have the required clearance and permission to do so from the government. It is believed that from these dubious agencies, a number of guards are now also involved in active crime, particularly extortion and dacoity.

Nisar Sarwar, who also runs a security company, says that to blame only the unregistered companies is unfair. He says that the situation in Karachi has created a demand for additional security guards and that the unregistered companies have completed all the formalities except that the home department is dragging its feet. "The problem is not the unregistered companies but the con-

ditions that create the demand for them."

The Citizens Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) has documented cases where the extortionist was the person's own security guard. However, the CPLC claims that kidnapping and extortion cases are becoming rarer. And yet another kind of kidnapping seems to have taken over in the city. This is where the children of small time businessmen are picked up, usually in a taxi, and then negotiations are held for their release with the parents. The ransom is comparatively lower than in high profile abductions, from Rs200,000 to Rs1 million. But the CPLC claims that after the arrest of certain gangs recently, this too is on the decline.

Crime figures are, however, hard to come by that could prove or disprove official claims. Most crimes in the city go unreported. This includes mugging, theft, robbery, kidnapping, extortion and assault. The worst are the crimes against women. In most cases, women are reluctant to take their case to the police for fear of further harassment. These go unreported in almost 90 per cent instances. More accurate statistics are available on car theft and murder. The reason for the reluctance of people to report many crimes is the fear that the police are involved. Recent arrest of policemen in such cases only strengthens that belief.

Currently, the most common crime in the city is mobile phone theft. Hundreds of such phones enter the market every day with shopkeepers selling them back as reconditioned models. In Karachi alone, 70,000 free connections were given in August. This adds to the problem. "Most of these connections are with people who can-

not afford a new phone. So the market for stolen phones gets even bigger," confides a senior police official.

Even in crimes that are well documented, the police seem helpless in curbing them. On an average, almost 30 vehicles are currently being stolen in the city daily, which is about 17 per cent more than last year. The bulk of these vehicles are taken to other parts of the country largely through the 27 exit points that lead from Karachi into Balochistan. This lucrative trade has been going for over a decade but for some reason the government cannot control it. CPLC chief Sharfuddin Memon says that car theft will reduce "if the government is really interested in this." SSP Hussain Asghar, in-charge of the Anti-Car Lifting Cell, admits that in the past one year not one person has been convicted of car theft in the province.

Where does that leave Karachi? Members of the diplomatic corps list Karachi after Baghdad and Kabul as danger postings in the region. Such a grading to some Pakistanis may sound exaggerated, but the fact is that parts of the city are now on the verge of breakdown.

Mr Memon says that the two areas that worry him most are old city areas like Lyari and newer localities like Gulshan-i-Iqbal. He says that Lyari has a deadly mix of problems. From an absence of civic amenities to the total breakdown in law and order. The drug mafias have come onto the streets where gun battles are commonplace. There are massive encroachments. The government looks the other way. The mafias continue to challenge the government.

In the case of Gulshan-i-Iqbal, the problem is different. Once an affluent

middle class locality, this area has the highest incidence of vehicle theft today, partially because of its location that provides easy access to escape routes bordering the city. To this list, Mr Jamil adds Jamshed Town, Gulberg and North Nazimabad as areas where the incidence of crime has risen significantly.

However, blaming only the police for this state of affairs may be unfair. The other major presence in the city is that of the Rangers, who have more or less dedicated themselves to the charge of fighting the war on terror. At the same time, however, their involvement in water distribution in the city has led to much criticism, much of it justified. Police officials also argue that the funds and infrastructure at the disposal of the Rangers could have helped build a better police force instead.

The problem of criminalization of the police force is also very much there. A number of new entrants have dubious records and many see police service as a means to make money. "We take serious notice of this," says Mr. Tariq Jamil. One example of the enterprising nature of the policemen is that they regularly collect money from owners of under-construction houses in Defence. The going rate is about Rs200 per week. This may seem small but the fact that they can get away with this raises questions about the ability of the police high command to monitor its staff. Most police officials dismiss the tall claims of police reforms made by the government. The police, they say, is the same; very little has changed at the thana level.

The city's worsening law and order situation has led to flight of capital. So frantic has been the rush to buy prop-

erty in Dubai that the State Bank has warned that this would affect the country's hard earned foreign exchange reserves. At the same time, Karachi remains the country's commercial capital and both the affluence and poverty seen here are striking. The one point agenda of the recently concluded Karachi Chamber of Commerce elections was law and order. Outgoing chamber president Siraj Kassam Teli says that businessmen are not only unhappy with the rise in robberies but also the inability of the police to deal with the problem.

Politics is also seen as a factor as the recent induction of policemen, under one guise or another, has been done almost entirely on political grounds. "These new entrants know that they are safe till their patrons are in power. Once they go, these policemen will also have to leave. So they are making the most of their time in uniform."

A number of solutions are being suggested. Many agree that instead of increasing the number of policemen, the answer would be to train the force better and give them better facilities to tackle crime. At the same time, bringing back policemen to their duties instead of protecting only the high and mighty would help. Community policing, as seen in the example of the CPLC, may also be enhanced. The connection between police officials and the people is broken, says one observer. This has to be re-established. Despite all the good talk, it seems that Karachi will continue to suffer from law and order turmoil in the near future before action is taken to set things right. The frightening part is that some say things are going to get much worse before they get any better.

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KARACHI's war on terrorism has resulted in an unprecedented rise in urban crime with city police officials making a case for more men and resources on fears that things will get worse, not better, in the coming months.

However, spending on law and order has reached record figures and bulk of the money allotted to the law enforcement agencies is being spent in non-productive areas. The previous co-relation between more men and material leading to less crime does not exist any more. Some even point to a deeper malaise, as there is a disturbing increase in the number of policemen caught indulging in criminal activity over the past year or so. The problem is further complicated by the rise in the number of terrorist attacks in the city and the manner in which the law enforcement agencies deal with the problem.

Since 2000, the government has poured Rs33 billion into the Sindh police. Annually, the police receive Rs9 billion, which is 10 per cent of the Sindh budget. On the whole, 18 per cent of the provincial budget goes to law enforcement agencies (LEAs) including the police, the Rangers and the Frontier Constabulary. Eighty per cent of the police budget is spent on salaries and perks for officials. Despite this heavy injection of funds, patrol vehicles and equipment are in bad shape. The vehicle fleet (with the exception of cars for senior officials) is over 12 years old.

Despite the induction of additional LEAs, crime has risen dramatically in the city over the past two years. Karachi's police chief Tariq Jamil puts the blame on lack of law enforcers on the street. On an average, a police sta-

tion in Karachi has about 32 policemen for regular duties in one shift. These are the people who man the station as well as patrol the area. "It is clearly not enough," says Mr. Jamil. Out of a strength of 28,000, about 21,000 policemen are on duty in the city on any given day. Out of this number about 7,000 are earmarked for anti-terror tasks, which include VIP duty. But this number excludes the other policemen who are drafted on and off, whenever there is a need. Mr. Jamil says that there is a misconception that a large number are assigned to protecting VIPs. "Remember, we also have to deal with sectarian as well as political and ethnic violence," he adds. This means stationing policemen outside places of worship, popular entertainment and eating places, foreign-owned installations and petrol stations in addition to guarding people under threat, like leaders and religious figures. Special security is also detailed for the city's large expatriate Chinese population.

Another problem is that the spread of policemen is uneven. As the Saddar and Clifton areas are in the high security zone created by the police, the number of policemen deployed there is very high. In contrast, city suburbs get much less policemen per square mile. That may be the reason for the rise in petty theft like mobile phone snatching, mugging and ripping jewellery off women in the street in areas in the city's East and Central districts. But there is public anger at the fact that most senior officers of the police and LEAs have a convoy of guards to protect them while the common citizen is left to fend for oneself.

These policemen can well be used elsewhere. The police high command

disagrees. It says that these convoys are needed as they serve as mobile police units that can address issues that take place as they move. The public, however, is unconvinced.

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middle class locality, it has the highest incidence of crime today, partially because it provides easy access to routes bordering the city. Mr Jamil adds that Gulberg and North Nazimabad areas where the incidence of crime has risen significantly.

However, blaming the police for this state of affairs is not the solution. The other major problem is that of the Rangers, or less dedicated police force in charge of fighting the crime. At the same time, the involvement in water supply in the city has led to a much of it justified. It also argues that the structure at the district level Rangers could have been better police force instead.

The problem of crime in the police force is not new there. A number of new recruits with dubious records and no training service as a means to get a job. "We take serious notice of Mr. Tariq Jamil. One of the enterprising nature of the police is that they regularly recruit from owners of small houses in Defence. They pay about Rs200 per week to the owner, small but the fact that they stay away with this raises the ability of the police to monitor its staff. Officials dismiss the tall claims of reforms made by the police, they say, is the same as before. It has changed at the top but not at the bottom.

The city's worsening situation has led to a frantic has been the re-