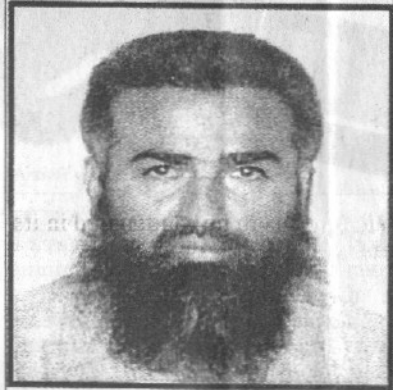
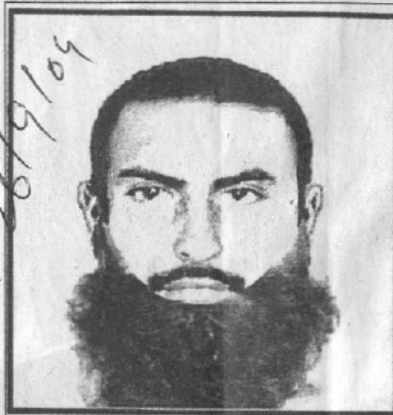


Sketchy business

By Shazman Shariff

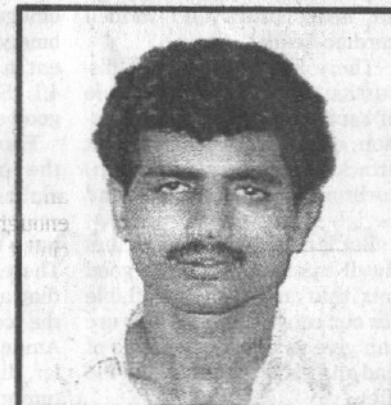
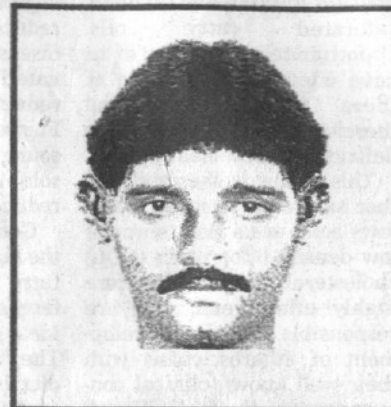
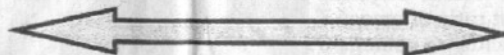
Making sketches of alleged criminals has always been an important part of crime investigation, but its effectiveness is still not very clear

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WANTED

Sketches made by CPLC



Accused Apprehended



opportunity to observe criminals for a longer time span.

Any victim, willing to help in the sketch-making process, is assured of privacy and protection. But the general fear among the people that they might undergo investigation ordeal and the way victims are treated by the police, often discourage many of them not to share any kind of information. However, painting a positive picture of the way things take place at the CPLC, Mr Memon said: "It is the general atmosphere in a police station, which dissuades people. Here, at our office, victims are treated in a friendly manner, unlike the police station where they may be intimidated."

It has also been noticed that children usually observe things in a better way and memorize minute details, which often proves to be helpful to those who are conducting investigations. A CPLC official said that once a case of house robbery was reported in which all family members were killed, except for a child who managed to hide in a corner. The same child later informed the police about how the robbers looked and what they were dressed in. Fortunately, the ruthless murderers were caught and brought to justice.

An artist who works with the CPLC said, "Eyes are the most important part of the face, when it comes to identifying a person. If a victim had eye con-

MORE often than not, being present at a place where crime is being committed scares the daylight out of you. In such a situation, particularly when the perpetrator of the crime is pointing a weapon at you, it becomes vir-

weapon at you, it becomes virtually impossible to keep a cool head. You have to have nerves of steel to observe how the criminal looks, dresses and what language he is conversing in. However, a person having keen observation can help the law enforcing agencies come up with the criminal's sketch — one of the important tools that the police relies on in apprehending criminals.

In Karachi, before the CPLC (Citizen Police Liaison Committee) emerged on the crime control scene, the sketch-making process was entirely handled by the police department. Although, it lacked modern facilities and relied on artists who did the job manually, getting a sketch made was certainly considered an important part of the investigation.

But the need for upgrading this area, in terms of capability, was felt when the CPLC, a couple of years after its inception in 1991, extended its cooperation to the police department. Soon the task landed into CPLC's lap, which introduced improved techniques into the field. Since then, the CPLC has been committed to the task of making sketches of criminals involved in various crime.

Highlighting the importance attached to sketches in tracing the whereabouts of outlaws, Sharafuddin Memon, Chairman CPLC, said: "Getting a sketch made is like identify-

ing a person. Criminals often get exposed this way and a sketch puts fear in them." He was glad that in this respect, the CPLC had been able to extend its maximum help to the police all over the country.

The CPLC these days has a special software in its armoury, made by a local firm, which has greatly enhanced the quality of sketches. Previously, the software that the FBI had provided to the CPLC for carrying out investigations, proved to be of little help. "The samples in the

previous software had to match features of criminals that were of Western origin. We wanted Asian features and skin tones to suit our need," said a CPLC official. Once a new software was acquired, the organization carried out the much needed improvisation by visiting the central prison and collected many samples of eyes, noses and faces of local origin.

"What we do is that we show samples of different eyes and noses to the victim and ask him if any of the samples match the

features of the criminal. This helps the victim point out the closest sample. Afterwards, with some further detailing, the sketch of a complete face is made. Considering the ever-increasing involvement of females in different kinds of crime, the CPLC intends to initiate a project, which is about furnishing a separate sample file of female features. Furthermore, the CPLC wants to make a photo file of criminals as part of the police record," the official said.

The task of making a sketch depends on how closely a victim observe a criminal. "If a victim had a cursory look at the criminal and has sketchy details to share with us, then we prefer not to have it made as it proves to be of no help," said a CPLC official. "A good sketch, if a victim has been able to recall maximum details, can fetch almost 70 per cent good results."

It has been noticed during house robbery or kidnapping cases that victims get a better

person. If a victim had eye contact with the criminal and he was mentally composed, then he could describe the facial features of the criminal more accurately." However, he said, "There is an element of risk involved in his work."

Once a sketch is made, it is handed over to the police so that investigations could be carried out. Getting the sketches published in newspapers serves to be a good source to inform all and sundry about the criminals. But because of the high cost, it is usually done only in serious cases, such as those involved in bomb blasts and other terrorist activity.

Although there have been several cases when criminals were caught because of a sketch, Mr Memon conceded that no proper statistics were maintained in this regard as the police department and the investigation team did not keep the CPLC abreast of the development of cases. "Once the sketch is made it is the police who work on the case, we don't follow that up, neither are we kept informed."

An important aspect, that is, the prosecution of criminals, which Mr Memon said was "a grey area" did not come under CPLC's purview. "Judgments are erratic and our criminal justice system has to improve. We don't have a good answer when people ask us if a criminal once caught would be prosecuted," he said.

WANTED

