

# *Law & Order Dawa* **Punjab crime surge** *14-1-05*

GIVEN the last few years' crime statistics for Lahore, the law and order situation in the Punjab capital seems appalling. Last year, a total of 1,478 dacoities and robberies were reported in the city, with a collective toll of 40 lives and Rs1.5-billion in cash and belongings lost. Vehicle theft and snatching incidents in the city hit a new high of 3,726, while incidents of theft mounted to 4,489, including 164 cases of purse-snatching or 'mugging'. Reports of police highhandedness and of their involvement in various crimes were rampant in the metropolis, with 4,500 policemen actually found guilty and convicted. While the crime surge in Lahore as compared with the previous year's statistics may not have been phenomenal, there is no denying the fact that the city has seen a steady increase in criminal activities over the past many years. The rest of the province registered an average increase of 21 per cent in various categories of crime reported over the same period. This reflects very badly on the performance of the Punjab police, and calls

for serious stocktaking by the provincial government.

The Punjab police have ostensibly got a number of incentives under the last police reforms, with the Lahore police also acquiring sleek patrol vehicles, but their anti-people attitude has remained unchanged. Armed with new surveillance gadgets and vehicles, they are either seen providing protection to the VIPs or harassing common citizens, with dacoits and robbers left alone to have a field day. The separation of the intelligence branch from other branches of the force, as provided for under the Police Order of 2002, has failed to bring about any significant improvement in police working. It is time intelligence agencies got on the trail of criminals instead of hounding opposition leaders, or themselves abetting in crime — as is largely believed to be the case. Protecting lives and properties of citizens is the foremost duty of the police force and the responsibility of the provincial government. On both counts, Punjab today has little to be proud of.