**A fiefdom of criminals**

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Karachi seems to have been turned into a fiefdom of criminals. Despite all the tall claims of police officials and the government, the citizens of the metropolis have no respite from mobile snatching, motorcycle theft, armed robberies and mugging.

Not a single day goes by when social media is not abuzz with video clips showing robbers aiming at hapless citizens, demanding valuables, mobiles and cash. They do not hesitate to open fire if they realize that the citizen could put up any resistance. At least 56 people reportedly lost their lives and 269 were wounded while resisting crimes between January and September.

The government may dismiss these incidents as inconsequential but those who lost their loved ones during these incidents or whose relatives were wounded during robbery bids or snatching incidents cannot easily forget this. The ruling elite of the province might assert that it has been taking concrete actions to tide over the phenomenon of rising street crimes but facts belie their assertions. According to the CPLC, around 2,446 mobiles were snatched in the last month alone while 4,553 two wheelers were stolen and 427 were snatched.

This is just the story of one month. It is claimed by local media that over 56000 incidents of street crimes happened in the metropolis from January one to September 5 only. Over 19,000 mobile phones were snatched from citizens, while 104 cars were forcefully taken away and 1,383 bikes were stolen. Around 35,000 citizens were deprived of their motorbikes during various incidents in the metropolis. Around 303 cases of house robberies were also reported.

Instead of addressing this menacing trend, officials and ministers seem to be adding to the injuries of citizens by holding them responsible for the unfortunate situation that they find themselves in. It is very sad to see Sindh minister and PPP leader Saeed Ghani accusing Karachi residents of being responsible for the problems the government is supposed to solve. Ghani and other ministers enjoy unprecedented security in their elite neighbourhoods with cops deployed to protect VVIPs while the people are left at the mercy of robbers, thieves and hardened criminals. This amounts to laughing at those whose bread-earners have fallen prey to these organized crimes which ministers and the government are supposed to prevent.

It is really surprising that the police are unable to trace these criminals despite their faces clearly captured by CCTV footage. Imagine if the son of a minister is robbed in broad daylight and the robbers are captured on camera. Would the police still take ages to detect the culprits? The cops would move heaven and earth in tracing the perpetrators, arresting them within 24 hours or even earlier. Similarly, the same alacrity would be demonstrated if the relatives of a VVIP happened to lose mobiles and valuables. But when it comes to addressing the problems of an ordinary citizen the police and officials would come up with a myriad of excuses for not helping them.

It is an incorrect perception that our police are not active and vigilant or watchful. It is absolutely incorrect to assume that they do not keep an eye on their jurisdictions. Make it seem like construction is going on in your area and within no time you will find the police knocking at your door and asking about various documents. Park a pushcart on a roadside bazaar and within no time our valiant warriors would appear, asking for permission letters and other papers. But when you report a crime, first you will face a number of problems in having an FIR registered and once it is registered, you will realize that the cops are punishing you instead of those that deprived you of your valuables. They might summon you almost every day to come and identify some people who may have nothing to do with your incident. At the end of the day, you will realize your blunder and withdraw the FIR, letting those who robbed you of your belongings go.

Even after the registration of an FIR, the police are least interested in recovering your stolen cars, snatched bikes and mobiles or robbed money. Ironically if you forget to get your phone SIM blocked and if the criminals misuse it somehow, you could be in trouble and the police might start harassing you instead of tracing those who snatched your mobile and deprive you of your valuables.

Perhaps it is because of these irrelevant matters that the recovery rate is very low. For instance, out of 2,446 mobiles snatched during the last month, only 46 were recovered. Around 4,980 two-wheelers were stolen or forcibly taken away from people last month and the police could only trace 282. And these are conservative estimates because many people tend to submit a handwritten application in a police station and go away because having an FIR registered could take hours which they cannot afford to spend in the police station for fear of losing their job or deduction of a day's wages.

The police have recently tried to create an impression that they are equipped with apps that would help them contain crimes. That is good news but what officials need to realize is that there are already many ways to capture at least those who were caught by the eye of a CCTV. All it requires is timely action which the police are unable to take. Why can authorities not coordinate with NADRA on an urgent basis to obtain the data of the persons who were caught on CCTV? Why can their identity and photos not be transferred to exit and entry points of the city and police stations?

In addition to that, a number of citizens have been using Gmail accounts which can give some clues about the location of the criminals. Recently a handicapped man was robbed in Korangi and this semi-literate man could notice that the criminals were very close to the place where he was robbed. He pleaded to the police to take prompt actions but his entreaties fell on deaf ears and the criminals got away with the looted mobiles and cash.

What is more disturbing is violence against women during house robberies and muggings. This could trigger a severe backlash. Although criminals can be found in all nationalities and ethnic groups, some elements are exploiting this rising menace of street crimes to ignite ethnic tensions. Such an approach could be catastrophic. Therefore, the authorities should spring into action, installing more and more street lights in all areas of Karachi, ensuring that the Safe Project – which consumes perhaps billions of rupees – works for an ordinary man and not for the elite only. The authorities must also come up with a plan to nab any criminal who is caught on camera snatching mobiles or robbing people, enhancing patrolling by paramilitary forces as criminals seem to be least bothered about the presence of cops, providing the required manpower and equipment to the police department and appointing new educated youth in this important institution.

More than nine million people are likely to fall below the poverty line which could lead to a further spike in crime. Therefore, apart from taking administrative actions, the government must also implement socio-economic plans to keep the youth from criminal activity.

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