**Cost of security**

BY H A J R A H M U M T A Z | 5/20/2019

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| FOR all those living in Karachi, urban crime is a f act of life -itis almost a `tax` that one might pay for all the services that one does not, in fact, get.Rare is the man who has not been threatened, of ten at gunpoint, even if he be as recognisable a person as Wasim Akram (who was not held up, but suf fered being fired at in the af termath of a road incident). The streets are for various, well-documented reasons awash with firearms, with much of the city`s petty crime occurring because the weapons are already at hand.This is hardly the case in lovely, leafy Islamabad or so it is thought.The rates of urban crime in the capital are certainly far lower than in Karachi, but they are climbing up nevertheless. The `war on terror` and the country`s action against militancy have taken a formidable toll, not just in terms of the weaponisation of the population, but also in correlating aspects such as ruralto-urban migration, the loss of lifestyles and livelihood, and a diminished tribal bond.The crime rate is high enough for those who can afford it to give various security companies flourishing business, which in their turn provide employment options for people who might run out of choices otherwise.So it was that, in the capital city recently, I happened to stay at a house that was equippe d with such an alarm system complete with a discreet sign at the gate, a complicated system of lasers, panic buttons in every room, and a system whereby the tripping of the alarm in the house would automatically alert the security company which would, within minutes, dispatch its private armed guards.Or so goes the theory, as it was explained to me earnestly. But, as always in Pakistan, there is many a slip `twixt the cup and the lip.As chance would have it, I happened to be out walking the household pet when there was suspicion of an attempted burglary at the residence.Because in Islamabad (unlike several other cities, say the police), one can still be confronted with a scenario such as `they slipped in through the window`, and not necessarily find oneself staring down the barrel of a gun, it fell to my offices to push the button.The gentleman of the house being aged and ill-disposed, it was further made my task to greet the guards, make sure they checked the perimeters, and take care of the needful.(The guards are not allowed into the house without being accompanied by police personnel, whom they are happy to call should the situation require their presence.) Coming from bad `ol Karachi, where I have encountered gardeners who have been heldup at gunpoint to be stripped of their meagre goods (to say nothing of having faced a couple of my own), I was prepared to be efficient.What I was not prepared for was an aging former soldier, retired at the rank of a hawaladar (I asked him later), albeit in the possession of his own firearm though thankfully never having had occasion to fire one.With him came three younger, similarly armed, men, one of whom stood at the gate and another of whom lurked in the shadows behind the dilapidated open-carriage vehicle they had come in, ready (one assumes) to perform as back-up should the situation turn serious.What none of the gentlemen seemed prepared for was a woman apparently in charge of the house, being thrown by the event to the extent of asking me what to do to which, of course, the answer was `Your job`.As it turned out, it fell to the woman to guide them across the boundary of the building, practically hold the torch for them, andrequest them to wire in a `location checked` to the head of fice.This episode`s simple takeaway point is the following: despite all its many, and grievous, wounds inflicted on it during its efforts against violence, Pakistan has not yet learned to put itsbest men on the front lines despite the fight being decades old in the making.Not to, in any way, take away from the achievements of the police force, which works hard and does have a few good men, the efforts towards ensuring security for the citizenry are pretty much the same across the board: lack of training, equipment and resources. Lives are laid down in vain, or compromised, due to the lack of foresight and/or planning at higher levels of the relevant bureaucracy; and there is an inability to correctly gauge risks and outcomes, and a tendency to second-guess.Yet most important of all be they private armies or the police paid from the public exchequer of central import is the need to train and suitably equip the persons on the frontlines.Without that, the country may continue to pay a high price, as it always has especially for the vast majority that looks to the public forces to keep the peace.  The writer is a member of staff.hajrahmumtaz@gmail.com |