Liton (not his real name) was only 14 when he had his first brush with the law. Detained by the police for picking pockets in Gulistan, he spent six months at a juvenile correctional facility in Tongi. Back out on the streets, he soon rejoined his partners in petty crime. By the time he was 16 Liton had graduated to mugging and bag-snatching. He has been caught several times, and on one occasion received a severe beating by a mob. After his latest arrest for being part of a "molom party" -- a gang that rubs toxic ointment into their victims' eyes before robbing them -- he has vowed to go straight. But even Liton doesn't know how long he can remain on the right side of the law.

"It's easy to say go and work. I have been pulling a rickshaw for a while, but it's hard work. I can't find anything better to do. But when I'm working (as a mugger) it's possible to get Tk. 500 with one Khep (criminal operation)."

Liton claims many transport workers and rickshaw pullers double as muggers at night. Says Liton, "mugging and snatching is easy in Dhaka."

That fact was brought home last month when a slew of muggings and holdups rocked the capital. Some of the incidents happened in broad daylight. On July 8 armed muggers snatched over Tk 3.70 lakh after shooting at an official of a pharmaceutical company on Ring Road in the city's Shyamoli area. In another incident, muggers shot at the manager of a non-governmental organisation but failed to take his money in South Keraniganj. On July 9 muggers snatched Tk 14 lakh from two men in the business district of Motijheel minutes after they left a money exchange. In a separate incident muggers shot a scrap trader and took away cash and a mobile phone set from him in the city's Golapbagh area. In another disturbing development, several cars were stolen from the Gulshan and Dhanmondi areas, prompting the police to request owners to be careful while hiring drivers.

The spate of brazen attacks has attracted attention, but many incidents of mugging and snatching that occur regularly in Dhaka go unreported. According to data provided by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, there were 113 registered cases of muggings in the capital during



A spate of brazen robberies have raised concern.