

Munirul Islam, Deputy Commissioner, Detective Branch



There is disparity between the viewpoints of the police and the public.

rob them at knife point. Firearms are also frequently brandished. Taxicabs and auto rickshaws are used to target unsuspecting passengers.

"This used to be a very safe area," laments Muhiuddin Chowdhury, a resident of Banani Road 11. "These days no one is safe. If I go out after dark, I leave my watch behind and carry very little money. I avoid taxis or CNGs. I would much rather travel on a bus with standing room only than take a black cab at night."

Along with the areas, the profile of victims has also changed. The typical victim of muggers used to be a lone female or elderly man walking in a deserted area. These days, young men and women are most frequently targeted -- mainly because they carry small items of value such as mobile phones and iPods.



Check posts have had limited success in combating street crime

"If I take an auto rickshaw at night, I sit at the very edge of my seat, ready to jump out if the CNG stops," comments Farhan, a student of North South University. "It is dangerous out there."

Despite the statistics and the preponderance of anecdotal evidence, the strange paradox is that this crime wave is not registering on the radar of the law enforcement agencies -- at least not officially. Speaking to the Star Magazine, the Officers in Charge (OC) of several Thanas said there were no muggings in their area since no cases had been lodged. The main reason for this great divide between the official view and the ground reality is the fact that most victims do not report to the police.

"There is a huge gap between the stance of the police and the perception of the public," says Hossain Khaled, former President of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industries (DCCI) and Corporate Director of Anwar Group. "Most people feel that it is a waste of time to go to the police station. Many even fear they will be harassed. There is a strong belief that many of the criminals have political shelter and their reach is longer than the arm of the law. It is up to the government to prove this wrong. If the people lose faith in the law, good governance becomes impossible."

Akmal, 34, was mugged on the airport road while in a taxi cab and left near Uttara. Dazed and shocked, he found a policeman with a walkie talkie. When he reported the crime, the police officer asked if he could remember the number of the taxicab. Akmal couldn't, but he gave a detailed description of the men and the stolen property.