

THE menace of extortion has re-emerged in Karachi, with the megacity's business community saying there has been an alarming surge in such cases. Criminals send extortion demands to traders — known as *parchi* in street parlance — often accompanied by a bullet to ensure the chilling message hits home: pay up or else. The head of Korangi's trade association says at least 96 extortion cases have been reported this year. The real number may be higher as many victims are afraid to file complaints. The targets include small traders as well as tycoons. In fact, the head of a famous charity was recently targeted by extortionists demanding billions. As per reports, much of the ill-gotten loot is transferred abroad by criminals. Moreover, another trade industry leader claims that "influential criminals" receive protection, while officials of various departments demand bribes from businessmen.

Over a decade ago, the crime situation in the metropolis was off the charts, with a high number of targeted killings, extortion cases and street crimes. Militant wings of political parties, religious extremists as well as criminal gangs all played their part in promoting lawlessness and violence in the city. Matters improved slightly after a law-enforcement operation was launched in 2013, but now it seems that the lawbreakers are once more feeling confident enough to restart their activities in a major way. Already Karachi suffers from poor infrastructure and services, despite adding billions of rupees to the exchequer. If violent crime returns in a big way, then perhaps members of the business community may be compelled to take their investments elsewhere, to safer climes, as they did in the past. The state, therefore, cannot leave Karachi to the wolves. The city police, Sindh administration and federal security agencies all need to coordinate and crack down on extortion rackets and other violent crime. Traders must be provided an atmosphere free of violent crime in order to carry out business activities.

 Word Count: 318 

Title: Karachi is being Criminalized again

Karachi, the city of lights, is once again slipping slipping to pre-2013 era when gangsters, violent criminals and religious extremists ruled the city. Once again traders are receiving extortion letters, warning bullet on head in case of non-compliance. Reportedly, 96 businessmen received extortion letters this year. Karachi contributes a significant amount of revenue to national economy so if situation did not improve, the business community may pull out their investment as they did before 2013 when the situation was alike. Therefore, the culprits should be curtailed to make Karachi safe for business.

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