



CoronaCrimeWatch Pakistan

Weekly Review of Organised Crime and Pandemic

(Compiled by National Initiative against Organised Crime (NIOC))

01 to 10 April 2020

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only affecting the economies and societies across the world but also changing the trends of the organized crime and illicit markets. Pakistan is already facing critical economic challenges as well as issues related to governance and internal security. While the coronavirus pandemic has complicated these challenges, it can also bring to fore new challenges related to organized crime and non-state actors in the country. There is a need for institutional vigilance to monitor the changing trends for better understanding and preparedness for future challenges. The National Initiative against Organized Crime (NIOC) is initiating a weekly monitor on Organized Crime as a civil society initiative to support the institutional responses. The weekly brief is a result of information collected from open sources, mainly the mainstream media reports, both Urdu and English, as well as information collected from various experts associated with the Project.

.....

1. General Trends

1.1. Coronavirus and the Street Crime:

The COVID-19 has affected the overall mobility of people everywhere in the world mainly due to lock-downs being observed across the globe. Google, in its recent assessment, showed that the lockdown has also changed the mobility patterns in Pakistan since it has been in force since

March 15th, thus causing around 70% drop in visits to retail and recreation spaces compared to normal periods of time.¹

However, there is little evidence available to verify that how the mobility trends have effected the organised crime in Pakistan. Though there is dearth of data to map the short-term impact of the COVID-19 on organized crime, but some media reports reflect that it has not any significant impact on street crime, at least in cosmopolitan city of Karachi. According to a police report comprising data from March 20 to April 7 (2020), at least 379 mobile phones and 31 motorbikes were snatched, while 1,049 robberies took place.² This reflects spike in violence could be witnessed in coming weeks.

1.2 COVID-19: Fear and Prisoners' Release:

On April 1, 2020, the Supreme Court (SC) overturned the orders passed by the Islamabad and Sindh High Courts, declared the temporary release of prisoners by the Government of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) as unlawful, and ordered re-custody of the released prisoners. The SC decision received mix response. Those disagreeing argued in the contexts of other nations, which took the preemptive measures and released prisoners who were not involved in heinous crimes. But the Pakistani SC advised that “an overcrowded prison, though an inconvenient abode, nonetheless, without a contaminated inmate is a safe place; instead of releasing them all, it is more expedient to screen the each after plugging the new entrant.”³ This is also argued that the beneficiaries of the Sindh and KP government's decision were the influential individuals sent to jail in corruption charges and the crimes related to misuse of the authority.

2. Terror Financing

The news about the extension in submitting its compliance report from Financial Action Task Force (FATF) had provided a sigh of relief to the government as the global financial watchdog extended the date for three months up to September from earlier June 2020. FATF has conveyed its decision to the Financial Monitoring Unit (FMU) for postponement of the Joint Working Group meeting for all countries, including Pakistan, scheduled to be held in Beijing in May 2020 due to the outbreak of COVID-19 virus.⁴ Pakistan's economy had been under immense pressure and the coronavirus health emergency and FATF extension will not only provide more time for the government to focus on recovering the economic crisis but also to take the more concrete initiatives against terror financing and money laundering.

¹ “Google reports on mobility trend changes in Pakistan during coronavirus lockdown,” *The News*, April 3, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/638828-google-reports-on-mobility-trend-changes-in-pakistan-during-coronavirus-lockdown>

² “Street crime in Karachi continues unabated despite COVID-19 lockdown,” *The News*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/641817-street-crime-in-karachi-continues-unabated-despite-covid-19-lockdown>

³ Hasnat Malik, “SC sets aside IHC, SHC orders for prisoners' release,” *The Express Tribune*, April 7, 2020.

⁴ Mehtab Haider, “FATF extends deadline to Pakistan,” *The News*, April 8, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/641212-fatf-extends-deadline-to-pakistan>

Prime Minister Imran Khan also announced tax amnesty scheme for construction sector – second by his government in less than one year – allowing people to invest their black money in the construction sector without disclosing source of income. The tax amnesty scheme will be implemented by promulgating a Presidential Ordinance.⁵ However, the economists fear that such schemes could create a problem for Pakistan concerning FATF. Renowned economist Hafiz Pasha stated in a TV talk-show that the amnesty scheme should not prolong beyond three months, otherwise the FATF can show concerns about the black money being invested in construction sector.⁶ FATF has already warned in one of its advisories that criminals can take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to carry out financial fraud and exploitation scams, including advertising and trafficking in counterfeit medicines, offering fraudulent investment opportunities, and engaging in phishing schemes that prey on virus-related fears. FATF has advised that the government should prepare proper guidelines for the private sector on how national AML/CFT laws and regulations will be applied during the current crisis. FATF notes that mechanisms by which victims, financial institutions, and other businesses can report COVID-19 related fraud may be especially useful.⁷

3. Drug Trafficking

During the week under review, law enforcement agencies confiscated a large number of drugs, mostly the hashish and arrested drug paddlers from different parts of the country. For instance, Nowshera District Police in KP Province arrested a drug peddler and recovered 2 Kg of heroin and 3 Kg of hashish. Another significant case was in Karachi where Excise Police chased a car of drug smugglers who fled leaving behind 13Kg of hashish. Similar incidents were also reported from Peshawar,⁸ and Mingora⁹ districts of KP province.

Punjab police also arrested three drug paddlers from Kasur,¹⁰ and Karor Lal Eesan,¹¹ and seized relatively smaller quantities of hashish. However, Pakistan Navy and Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) in two different joint operations in Karachi and Makran coastal region confiscated 100 Kg

⁵ Shahzad Raza, “PM unveils amnesty scheme for the construction sector,” *The Express Tribune*, April 4, 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2190567/2-pm-unveils-amnesty-scheme-construction-sector/?amp=1>

⁶ Daily *Jang* (Urdu), April 4, 2020, <https://e.jang.com.pk/04-04-2020/pindi/pic.asp?picname=55.png>

⁷ Statement by the FATF President: COVID-19 and measures to combat illicit financing, which can be seen here: <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/fatfgeneral/documents/statement-covid-19.html>

⁸ For instance, 4 smugglers were reported detained from Peshawar and 2Kg hashish and one gram ice were siezed. (Source: *Roznama 92 News* (Urdu), April 7, 2020, https://www.roznama92news.com/efrontend/web/index.php/?station_id=4&page_id=6&is_common=&xdate=2020-04-07&n=n12

⁹ Police foiled a drug smuggling bid in Mingora, arrested a suspected smuggler and seized 2 Kg of hashish. (Source: *Roznama 92 News* (Urdu), April 4, 2020, https://www.roznama92news.com/efrontend/web/index.php/?station_id=4&page_id=1&is_common=&xdate=2020-04-04&n=n28

¹⁰ Daily *Dunya* (Urdu), April 8, 2020, https://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2020-04-08&edition=LHR&id=5132824_93395749

¹¹ *Roznama 92 News*, April 10, 2020, https://www.roznama92news.com/efrontend/web/index.php/?station_id=8&page_id=1&is_common=&xdate=2020-04-10&n=n13

crystal meth and 100Kg of ice drug, respectively.¹² In Pusukan Costal area, the ice drug was recovered from a boat and its destination was Karachi and the second operation was conducted in Bin Qasim area where the crystal meth was hidden in a store. Both incidents indicate that narco-traffickers have increased the supplies of the drugs and could be linked in the increase of the demand during the coronavirus pandemic, or they have found gaps in the responses of the drug control authorities because of the focus on precautionary measures to the viral pandemic.

4. Cybercrimes

The COVID-19 has increased the traffic on cyberspaces manyfold. This trend has also increased the vulnerabilities of the cyberspaces where cybercriminals are reportedly inventing new methods to engage in fraudulent acts. In this context, a highlight last week in Pakistan was the exploiting of the Zoom videoconferencing and collaboration application during the coronavirus pandemic by the cybercriminals.¹³ The FATF advisory, as cited earlier, also particularly warns about the threat of increasing cybercrimes including fundraising for fake charities, and various medical scams targeting innocent victims. Pakistan has taken few initiatives in this context, and Federal Investigative Agency's (FIA) and financial institutions, including banks, have launched campaigns on social media and sending alerts about such frauds, which are increasing during the times of pandemics. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has also warned of possible cyber attacks under the guise of messages containing coronavirus information and advised people not to use WiFi at public places.¹⁴

.....

About NIOC:

National Initiative against Organized Crime (NIOC), established in collaboration with the Global Initiative Resilience Fund, is the first-ever initiative in Pakistan being executed by a group of committed professionals and experts with law enforcement, media and other public service backgrounds. NIOC aims to build community resilience and influence public policy to combat organized crime.

Website: <https://nioc.pk>

Email: info@nioc.pk

¹² Daily *Dunya*, April 4, 2020, https://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2020-04-04&edition=KCH&id=5125967_23059889

¹³ Alex Scroton, "Coronavirus: Criminals using Zoom installer to spread cryptominer," Computerweekly, April 7, 2020, <https://www.computerweekly.com/news/252481274/Coronavirus-Criminals-using-Zoom-installer-to-spread-cryptominer>

¹⁴ "PTA warns of cyber attacks, advises against use of public WiFi," Geo TV [website], April 4, 2020, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/280865-pta-warns-of-cyber-attacks-via-coronavirus-messages-advises-against-using-public-wifi>