

Defenceless toll plazas at the mercy of rough customers

Indrani Basu | INX

They handle many thousands of vehicles and lakhs of rupees every day. But rather than being secure gateways that deter criminals fleeing down highways, toll plazas around the city have shown themselves to be quite helpless in the face of crime over the last few days. A gatekeeper's murder at the Kherki Daula toll plaza in the early hours of Friday, and a robbery at the Dasna toll plaza the same night have raised questions about security arrangements at not only the turnpikes around the capital but also the highways.

TOI did a spot check of five key toll plazas on Monday and found gaping holes in their arrangements, from inadequate manpower to defunct cameras. Keeping the NCR's gun culture in mind the plazas' guards, armed with nothing more than old shotguns, live in dread of troublemakers. "We are completely on our own, so anybody can refuse to pay toll," an employee at the Delhi-Gurgaon toll plaza said.

Delhi-Gurgaon border

At the KM-24 toll plaza, vehicles from 11 neighbouring villages are allowed free passage, provided their drivers show proof of address. However, many drivers try to muscle their way through on this pretext without showing any document. "Drunken drivers are common here, and some even pull a gun on us if we demand the toll. The three armed guards we have are seldom around. There's nothing that we can do in self-defence as the management is unwilling to support us," a toll employee said on the condition of anonymity. The plaza has 32 dome cameras in side booths and 36 still cameras equipped with night vision in lanes outside the booth, said officials. "PCR vans are present sometimes, but our own patrol vehicles keep circulating through the route," said Manoj Aggarwal, CEO of DCS, the agency in charge of the toll plaza.

Kherki-Daula

Four days after a toll collector was shot dead by a vehicle owner here, there has been no improvement in security at the toll plaza, said employees. "The staff at

the plaza has steadily decreased over time, and the management does not bother to hire again. Sometimes, we have only one line assistant at night whereas we started with around 60. There are supposed to be at least eight on duty at a time," said an employee.

The 10-lane plaza has 16 dome camera booths, 16 cameras mounted on the canopy and 16 more still cameras with night-vision ability in the lanes outside the booths, said officials. The booth staff is not allowed to carry cellphones and has to rely on the intercom and a panic button to report any emergency.

A fortnight ago, an employee was allegedly hit by a car when he tried flagging it down for going through the bike lane. "The car went over his foot and carried him along for 100 metres until it hit an auto and he slid off the bonnet. We are scared of doing our duty fearing for our lives," said an employee.

Badarpur

Three gunmen, six line assistants and six security guards should be present for every 10 lanes of this 32-booth plaza. However, TOI found a lone gunman on

Photos: Piyal Bhattacharjee



SNOOZING ON DUTY

the Delhi side, and none on the Faridabad side. "No gunman has been posted on the Faridabad side for six months," said an employee. The two line assistants on duty said their walkie-talkies had poor range. "We keep losing the signal," said one. However, S Raghuraman, project manager, said, "We have panic alarms and intercoms inside the booths so that employees can get in touch with the con-

trol room when necessary".

DND

Security at this toll plaza is slightly better, but the guards complain their 12-bore shotguns are no match for criminals' sophisticated arms. "We have to reload manually after every shot," said a guard. DND PRO Niranjan Paharia said, "Since we want toll collectors to have minimum communication with vehicle owners, doors and windows are kept closed at all times with only a space to collect money and give the receipt. The panic button is placed at the feet (of the operators). We also keep having mock drills".

Dasna

Broken barriers, rundown booths and dysfunctional CCTV cameras mark this toll plaza on NH-24. The barrier arms have remained broken for months, so employees have to manually flag down cars. Many vehicles refuse to stop. "We suffer a loss of around Rs 2 lakh daily. Many of those who stop at the toll plaza claim they are locals, and should not be asked to pay. After the armed robbery, the police have agreed to post two armed officers with a bike at the plaza at night," said ND Shukla, manager. TOI found the entire staff without safety jackets. Not only were some of the cameras broken, the CCTV feed sometimes did not stream from the server. The booths were without intercom and panic buttons.

SITTING DUCKS

Toll plazas on major roads around the city lack security measures



DND (DELHI-NOIDA)

- ▶ Three armed guards for 35 lanes
- ▶ Only three line assistants present at a time
- ▶ Guards have 12-bore guns that require manual loading after each shot



GURGAON-ANANASAR

- ▶ No new security measures after murder
- ▶ Staff crunch - few line assistants available
- ▶ Toll collectors don't have mobile phones
- ▶ Booths have only intercom & panic button
- ▶ Walkie-talkies provided only to line assistants



BADARPUR

- ▶ One gunman on Delhi side, none on Faridabad side
- ▶ Two line assistants for 32 booths
- ▶ Toll collectors don't have mobile phones
- ▶ Booths have only intercom & panic button
- ▶ Walkie-talkies provided only to line assistants



DASNA

- ▶ CCTV cameras out of order
- ▶ Barrier arms broken
- ▶ No intercom or panic button in booths
- ▶ Only three guards, each armed with a 12-bore gun that requires manual loading
- ▶ Two armed cops stationed at night after recent robbery



DELHI-GURGAON

- ▶ No armed guard seen
- ▶ Toll collectors don't have mobile phones
- ▶ Toll booths have only intercom and panic button to communicate with control room
- ▶ Walkie-talkies provided only to line assistants
- ▶ Police not present round the clock