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## Beware, Big Brother is watching

Pune Mirror | Oct 22, 2014, 02:30 AM IST

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Police officials watching the footage in the control room at the police commissioner's office (Photo by Dhananjay Helwade)

By: Sandip Kolhatkar &amp; Mubarak Ansari

*137 cameras keep an eye over the city round the clock; footage to also help police track own personnel.*

September 28, 3.05 am: A man removes MSEB cables at Kude Chowk opposite the Pune Municipal Corporation building. Everytime he saw an approaching vehicle, he would go away and return once the the vehicle passed. Beat marshalls finally apprehend him red handed.

October 3, 4.45 pm: A group of men passing by the busy Khandoji Baba Chowk steal a commuter's mobile. Within minutes, cops catch the accused near Good Luck Chowk.

October 12, 7.47 am: A man in khaki uniform stops passing vehicles, and demands money for having violated traffic rules. A policeman sitting in the control room spots this and sounds an alert. By the time beat marshalls arrive, the man has hopped on to a crowded bus and fled. A hunt spanning various police stations and their jurisdictions results in the accused finally getting caught at Shukrawar Peth, about 9.10 am.

The three crimes were all detected with the help of high-resolution cameras installed at all major junctions in Zone I of the city. Police officials have been monitoring the feeds round the clock from a control room in the police commissioner's office. The cameras have been functional since last month's Ganpati festival.

Areas like Shivajinagar, Deccan Gymkhana, Kothrud, Warje-Malwadi, Kasba Peth, Budhwar Peth, Navi Peth, Sadashiv Peth, Karve Nagar, etc have been covered by 137 such cameras. Live images and videos are streamed to the control room, where operators keep a watch on 68 spots simultaneously. The cameras can zoom up to 300 metres and are capable of rotating 360 degrees. About 20 police officers are deployed to watch the live streaming and inform the beat marshal if they see something suspicious. "The quality of the cameras is so good that we can zoom into the wristwatch of a passer-by and check the time," a police officer said.

The cameras are part of an ambitious project that aims to install 1,285 CCTVs across Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad. Costing Rs 225 crore, the project was first mooted after the German Bakery blast in 2010 that killed 17 people and injured 64. Two years later, the JM Road blasts took place in August 2012, but the plan still failed to gain momentum. Finally, the wheels were set in motion following two low-intensity blasts outside the Faraskhana and Vishrambaug police stations on July 10 this year. Police commissioner Satish Mathur took a personal interest and pushed for early installation of the cameras.

"The control room is manned by trained police personnel and equipped with state-of-the-art technology. All cameras in Zone I are linked to the control room. Work is on to install the remaining cameras from other zones of the city as well," said additional commissioner of police (administration) Abdur Rahman. "Thanks to live footage, we have caught several people red-handed while committing the crime."

Interestingly enough, the cameras are not only helping the police apprehend criminals, but also ensuring that the constabulary is itself on its feet. Deputy commissioner of police Sarang Awad often walks into the control room and takes a close look at the movement of vehicular traffic and the work being done by traffic police. "I once went to the control room and saw that a major chowk wasn't manned by traffic constables. I immediately alerted them via wireless and directed them to be back on their spots as the situation was going haywire. This new system proves quite handy when it comes to monitoring movement of traffic and giving instructions for any changes," Awad said.



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