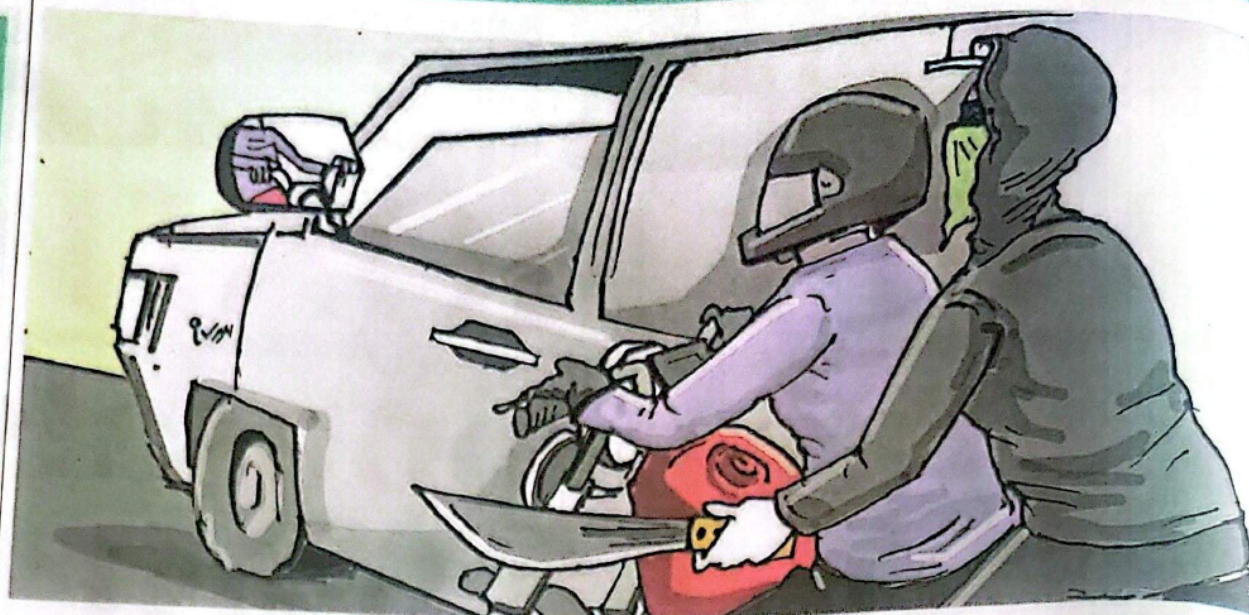




How suspected thugs moving on boda boda trail their victims. ILLUSTRATION/IVAN SSENKONJO

Robbers strike again on Kampala-Masaka Road

Motorcycles have become the weapon of choice for gangs, who swoop in like vultures on unsuspecting victims.

BY BENSON TUMUSIIME



Ms Rachel Kawala, the Kampala Metropolitan Police spokesperson.

Police have launched a major crackdown on criminal gangs following a surge of robberies along the Kampala-Masaka Highway, particularly within the Busega-Kyengera swamp corridor.

According to reports, gangs riding boda bodas have been tailing motorists caught in traffic jams, targeting those suspected of carrying money or valuables. The criminals smash car windows and rob occupants in broad daylight.

Another group prowls on foot, assaulting pedestrians, snatching bags and mobile phones. Most attacks occur between 7pm and 10pm, focusing on taxi passengers distracted on their phones, drivers in saloon cars, and boda boda riders carrying bags during peak traffic.

The resurgence of crimes along the Kampala-Masaka Highway and the Northern Bypass highlights a growing trend of organised criminal activity in the capital. Motorcycles have become the weapon of choice for gangs, who swoop in like vultures on unsuspecting victims.

Mr Nelson Ssekito, the chairperson of the Square B Busega Boda Boda Stage, said the gangs operate from bases near Busega roundabout and Kabale Busega market, targeting victims from 6pm until early morning.

"Some of them hide in the boda boda

industry. They own motorcycles but are not riders. They use them as getaway vehicles. Others move on foot, and after snatching bags and phones, they melt into the swamp," Mr Ssekito said. He added that the gangs shift their hunting grounds across Bwaise, Namungoona, Masanafi, Busega, and Kyengera swamp to mask their identities.

Kampala Metropolitan Police spokesperson Rachel Kawala said law enforcement officers have intensified operations on the Northern Bypass from Kyengera up to Namboole.

Police effort

"We arrested four suspects on Saturday night and recovered 20 iPhones and two Tecno phones from a makeshift structure in the Kyengera swamp area," Ms Kawala said. She identified the suspects as John Muwesi (33), Saka Mbazanyi (25), Stephen Kabuka (23), and a 17-year-old, all residents of Busega.

The arrests followed a report from a businesswoman whose laptop bag containing Shs5,340,000, two smartphones, and her National ID [card] was stolen. "Following the report,

the operation was conducted on Saturday by a police task team targeting identified criminal hideouts within the Busega swamp. Suspects were arrested and are currently detained at Kyengera Police Station pending prosecution," Ms Kawala said.

She added that efforts are ongoing to trace the rightful owners of the recovered devices and apprehend more suspects.

Investigations reveal that taxi gangs often lure unsuspecting passengers into front seats before tricking them into alighting mid-route.

One thug, posing as a conductor, blocks the door while another picks the passenger's pocket in a bait-and-switch tactic. Police have urged the public to remain vigilant and avoid boarding taxis outside designated stages.

"We have made some arrests of gang members, like those smashing windows of motor vehicles in traffic jams and those snatching people's bags

and phones. The suspects have been cooperative and were charged in court of law," Ms Kawala said.

Law enforcement officials warn that criminals are adapting to police surveillance by changing operational tactics. Offenders now plan their attacks meticulously, using technology, coordination, and gaps in urban security to avoid detection. Thieves often exploit isolated black spots where they hide, execute crimes, and vanish undetected.

Deadly spots

A mini survey by the *Daily Monitor* identified three major black spots with trenches connected to swamps used as escape routes: Busega roundabout, Masanafi, and Namungoona.

Businessman Richard George Olalu, who operates public transport in Kyengera, said criminals collaborate with street vendors, particularly those selling mulondo (herbal stem tuber) and nuts, who act as informants.

"The vendors scan vehicles for valuables and alert thieves discreetly. Once a target is identified, the criminals operate in plain sight yet with precision," Mr Olalu explained.

Authorities continue to grapple with organised crime syndicates, which have refined their methods to stay ahead of law enforcement while exploiting gaps in urban security.

Police attribute the rise in crime to factors such as poor lighting, sprawling drainage systems, unplanned settlements, and youth chasing quick money rather than doing honest work.

According to the 2024 police crime report, 7,330 cases of mobile phone theft were recorded, a slight decrease from 7,407 cases in 2023. Despite this, mobile phone theft remains rampant in urban areas, especially in crowded spaces, public transport, and traffic congestion.

THUGS' MODUS OPERANDI

- Ride boda bodas or operate on foot to target traffic jams.

- Smash car windows to steal valuables from motorists and passengers.

- Snatch bags and phones from pedestrians and distracted passengers.

- Use street vendors and market sellers as informants to identify targets.

- Exploit isolated spots, swamps, and poor lighting to avoid arrest.