

# Dawn Investigation: Rao Anwar and the killing fields of Karachi

RAO ANWAR'S 'ENCOUNTERS'   A LAW UNTO HIMSELF   'GOLD SAND' RACKET   JETTING OFF TO DUBAI



Rao Anwar with his associates — DawnNews/file

Around 2pm one day in October 2008, a convoy of police mobiles was on its way back after visiting the scene of a murder in Moach Goth, when two young men in a white Toyota Corolla mischievously zig-zagged in front of it.

Superintendent Police (SP) Rao Anwar, who had been promoted from the rank of DSP a month earlier, was leading the convoy. According to one of the police officials in a follow-up vehicle, Rao was furious at the 'affront' and ordered that the car be stopped, but the youths sped away.

Two mobiles, on Rao's orders, raced after the vehicle as it turned into Baldia Town. "I followed, intending to sort things out. After all, the boys hadn't done anything criminal," recalls the official.

Suddenly, gunshots rang out. He soon came upon a crowd of people gathered around the Corolla; inside was the body of one of the young men he had earlier seen in the car.

"He couldn't have been more than 18 or 19 years old. The people there said the police had killed him. It made me think, what kind of a man can murder people in this way?"

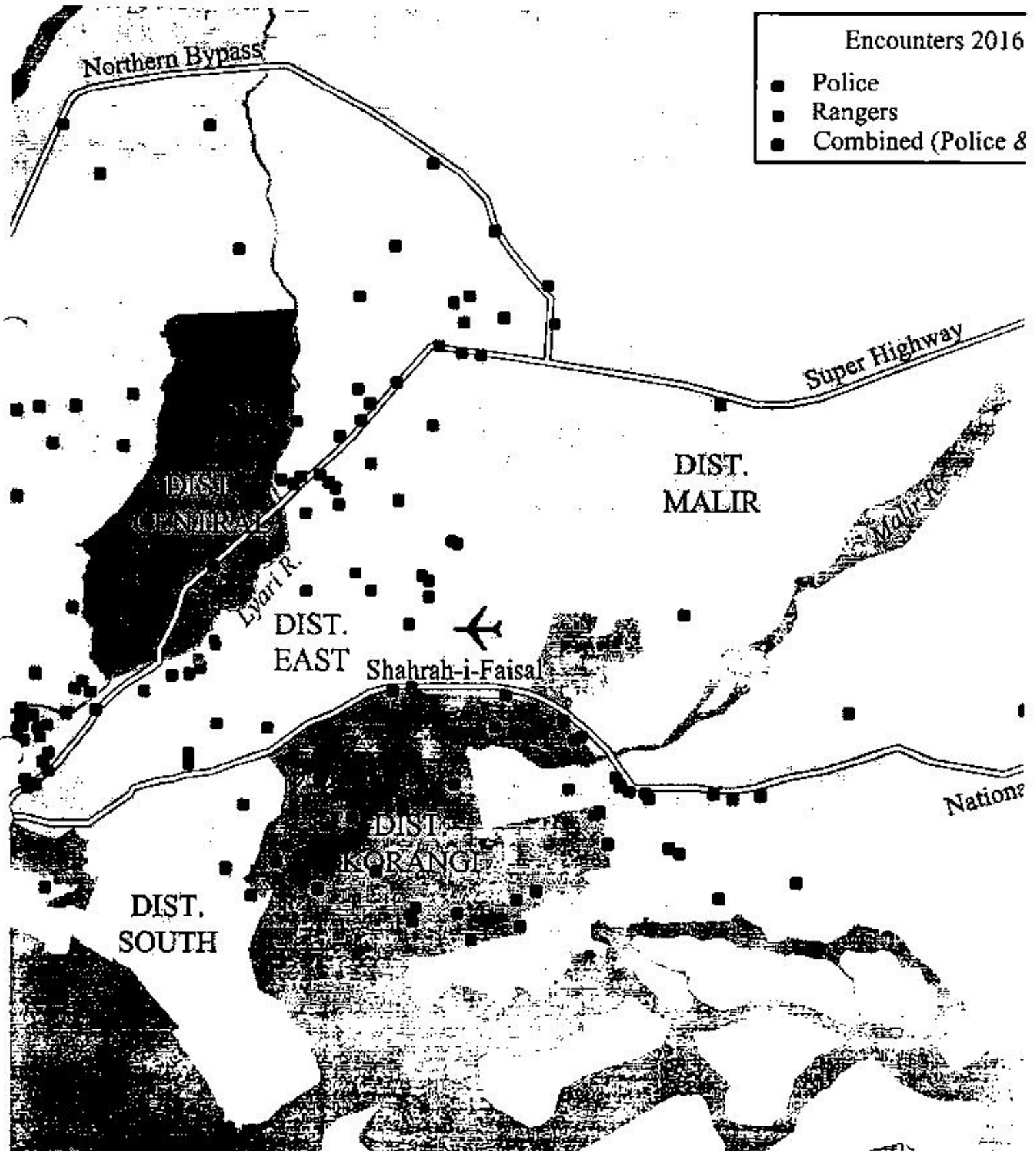
A decade later, as details about Rao's 'exploits' are coming to light, the more relevant question is, what kind of law-enforcement system nurtures men like Rao Anwar?

***What kind of law-enforcement system accommodates and protects cops like the former Malir SSP?***

About a kilometre off the National Highway, inside a deserted two-room farmhouse, the light from the setting sun reflects on a wall pock-marked with bullet holes. Above them hangs a portrait of the Quaid-i-Azam. The bullet marks and a bloodstained carpet are the only evidence that remains of the murders last month.

“Two bodies were found here, and two in the other room,” says a DSP. Among those bodies was that of Nageebullah Mehsud, the young man whose death in a fake encounter last month led to Rao’s suspension as Senior Superintendent Police (SSP) Malir.

Read more: [Rao Anwar contacting reporters through WhatsApp which police can't trace: IG Sindh](#)



his encounters in Malir district except for those collated from news reports. The complete record of encounters under SSP Malir did not exist even in t

Until Nageebullah’s murder, Sindh’s so-called encounter specialist had not faced any inquiry over the number of encounter killings to his ‘credit’. Not a single inquiry — despite having slain at least 444 people between 2011 and 2018, according to the police’s own records. Not a single policeman was even injured, let alone killed, during the 745 encounters.

The Rangers-led operation in Karachi, which began in late 2013, gave fresh impetus to police encounters in district Malir during Rao’s tenure.

According to police records, Malir saw 195 police encounters from January to October 2012, in which 18 people were killed and 276 arrested; the ratio of deaths to arrests — the 'kill rate' — was 6.5 per cent. Between February to June 2013, the kill rate was 17.6pc.

In 2014, after the operation began, there were 186 encounters, in which 152 people died and 192 were arrested — the kill rate a whopping 79pc. Last year, there were 93 encounters resulting in 110 deaths and 89 arrests. That translates to the number of arrests falling 23pc below the number of people killed.

The current law enforcement system is simply not capable of telling us as to how many innocents like Naeqebullah were among those mowed down.

"He led a team of killing machines. There was no one to stop him," says a senior police official. "Why was no notice taken of his actions earlier? The truth is, everyone knows everything, but even the police command is afraid of him because of his close connections with criminal political bosses and within the security establishment."

(Interestingly, no record of Rao Anwar's encounter killings existed in the central police office in Karachi.)

In the words of another long-serving police official: "Men are airlifted from as far away as Fata and brought here for him to dispatch. That's why there are so many policemen being targeted in Karachi. These are reprisal killings."

(In the latest case as well, other than Naeqebullah, the three men who were shot dead alongside him were also, say sources, handed over to Rao by the agencies. One of them, Mohammed Sabir, they add, was a missing person who had been picked up from Uch Sharif in southern Punjab one and a half years ago against whom no criminal record has been found.)

That Pakhtun tradition of *badal* (vengeance), according to several serving and retired police officials, is the reason why encounter killings are unknown in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or Fata. "But the powers that be don't care that the cops in Karachi are dying like dogs for doing their dirty work," said a police official.

According to a source in the Sindh government, about four months ago, an awkward situation arose during a visit to the Sindh secretariat in Karachi by several military officials. Among those at the meeting was the chief secretary as well as the late Mir Hazar Khan Bijarani. The visitors included a lieutenant general, four major generals and some foreign military officials.

"One of the generals asked the CM why the provincial government was not taking action against such a murderer. Shah Sahib ignored the question, but when another officer of the same rank later repeated the question, he finally responded, 'It would be better for you to also ask your corps commander and the agencies,'" says the source.

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The abandoned farmhouse in Malir where Naqeebullah Mehsud and three others were shot dead in a fake encounter. The bullet holes in the boundary wall can be clearly seen.—White Star

Pakistan's chaotic largest city is no stranger to extrajudicial killings, and Rao Anwar is not the only cop who is guilty of the odious practice. SSP Chaudhry Aslam of course was among the known practitioners of the tactic until he was killed in a suicide bombing in early 2014.



There are a number of serving police officials that are guilty of the same, although Rao is recognised as being in a class of his own.

According to data from the home department, aside from encounters in which Rao was involved, there were in all of Karachi at least 304 encounters in 2017 resulting in 170 deaths, down from a high of 1,719 such incidents in 2014 with 609 deaths.

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***The former SSP was the head honcho of a vicious cabal, including cops and local thugs, who were part of a network extorting protection money and running a number of rackets. Anyone who crossed them or refused to pay was picked up, detained and tortured, sometimes even killed in fake encounters.***

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Extrajudicial killing is always justified on the grounds that the criminal justice system is too weak to deal with the level of criminality that has been rampant in the country in recent years. Proponents of this tactic argue that the entire process, from the gathering of evidence to the prosecution of the crime, is flawed and corrupted, with the result that criminals are soon back on the streets again. Witnesses who dare to give evidence put their lives in jeopardy.

For example, after social activist Sabeen Mahmud was murdered in Karachi in April 2015, her driver Babu, who was sitting in the back seat when she was shot dead in her car, identified the killers in front of a magistrate.

There was no one-way mirror or any kind of partition separating the suspects from Babu.

An acquaintance of his recalls Babu later phoning him frantically, convinced he was in danger. Sure enough, he was killed on Sept 7, a few months after Sabeen's death.

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However, extrajudicial killing as an alternative to due process is no answer. “It is a slippery slope whose extreme manifestation is an individual like Rao Anwar,” says a former IG.

We must understand that the police is a component of the overall criminal justice system. Reforms in police can't produce the desired results unless the judiciary, prosecution, jails and other arms are also brought in line with the best norms and international practices.

Delayed decisions and corruption in the courts, corruption and lack of correctional methods in jail will nullify police reforms. One can also ask what was the need for extrajudicial killing when military courts had been set up as an extraordinary measure to deal with ‘jet black’ criminals.

Retired IG Afzal Shigri believes that fake encounters are counter-productive for three reasons. “They are illegal, immoral and no one will come to your rescue when things change.”

As an example, he cites the case of the policemen who had participated in the operations against the MQM in the ‘90s and then ended up being eliminated by the party’s militants when the MQM regained its hold on Karachi.

Lawyer Faisal Siddiqi sees the reliance on extrajudicial killing as “a Hobbesian approach to restoring order. The provision of justice, or other basic services, is of no interest to the government. As the state is becoming weaker, it is becoming more authoritarian.”



Bullet holes and blood stains in the room where two of the four dead men were found. — White Star



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After years of operating with impunity, young Naqeebullah's cold-blooded murder was the catalyst for Rao's activities coming in for long overdue scrutiny. However, as far as he is concerned, he is still above the law.

After refusing to cooperate with the inquiry committee set up to probe the deaths of Naqeebullah, Rao disappeared.

(The three-man team included Additional IG CTD Sindh Sanaullah Abbasi, DIG South Azad Khan, and also his immediate boss DIG East Sultan Khawaja under whose command district Malir falls.) His inner circle of 15 to 20 policemen, including his nephew Rao Amir, has also vanished, seemingly without a trace.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court granted protective bail to Rao; he has been ordered to appear in court today.

The inquiry report established Naqeebullah's innocence. He was not a former TTP commander nor involved in the Dera Ismail Khan jailbreak nor a gunman of Baitullah Mehsud, as Rao has alleged. The document also contains some notable details; for example, the post-mortem points out that Naqeebullah was shot twice in the back.

Among the appendices attached to the report is a statement by the station investigation officer, Inspector Nasrullah, newly appointed to the Shah Latif Town police station within whose limits the murder occurred. The SIO's account exposes a sordid cover-up by the SHO Shah Latif Town Amanullah Marwat, who has also since disappeared.

The SIO has said that when he tried to probe deeper into the 'encounter' he was threatened that he too would be bumped off in a similar fashion if he didn't step back. The security risks are such that the inquiry committee in its recommendations suggested that the witnesses be provided protection under the Sindh Witness Protection Act 2013.

Rao enjoyed a nearly seven-year long tenure as SSP Malir (punctuated with some gaps), not to mention several preceding



years in the same district, completely contrary to police rules. Even now, the locals are so terrified that no one, other than Naqeebullah's family, is willing to speak on the record about their experience at his hands.

The fear runs so deep that the family of two brothers who were picked up and allegedly killed in a staged encounter refused to speak with *Dawn* even though they have since moved out of Sohrab Goth. They are convinced that elements of the deep state that have protected him all along will protect him even now, said a local.

Moreover, Rao not only oversaw the 'police encounters' of so-called jet-black terrorists handed to him. He was the head honcho of a vicious cabal, including cops and local thugs, who were part of a network extorting protection money and running a number of rackets, including land-grabbing, sand and gravel (reti bajri) lifting for the construction business, smuggling of Iranian petrol, vice dens, narcotics and illegal water hydrants.

Anyone who crossed them or refused to pay was picked up, detained and tortured, sometimes even killed in fake encounters.

A police official who is well acquainted with the former SP's activities says: "Rao was running a multi-billion rupee criminal empire from his office in Malir. The district was his fiefdom. There was a team under him who located the people, taking one lakh from one, Rs15 lakh from another, dispatching some. It was total lawlessness."

According to a mid-level cop posted at a Malir police station, who has also worked with Rao, money was the motive why Naqeebullah was picked up. "Rao's touts amongst the Sohrab Goth shopkeepers came to know that Naseem was in possession of a hefty amount of money with which he wanted to buy a shop," he said.

"Two policemen — SI Yaseen Dhukku and ASI Akbar Mallah — picked him up along with two of his friends from a restaurant on Ahul Hassan Isnahani road. While they let his friends go

they continued to torture him even after extracting Rs9 million, demanding he pay them Rs20m more. By then, he was in such bad shape that they decided it would be unwise to set him free.”

Interestingly, while the top cops investigating the Malir cases remained tight-lipped, the head of the shopkeepers' association in the Sohrab Goth market has also gone missing.

A DSP posted in Malir also alleges there are farmhouses in Gadap, Memon Goth and Gulshan-e-Maymar where Rao and his henchmen detained people, up to 40 at one location.

“Heaven knows what has become of them in the last few weeks since Rao and his team have been on the run.”

It is a measure of Rao's clout that — barring only one occasion in the past — even when he had been suspended as SSP, an official of his choice was appointed to his post to keep his seat warm. The stand-in used to be Dr Mohammed Najeeb Khan, SP Malir, who after Rao's reinstatement would revert to his previous position as SP.

Even the Sindh chief minister was helpless before a policeman who knew he was more powerful than even the province's top executive. After being suspended for arresting MQM leader Izharul Hassan, he challenged his suspension in court. He was reinstated a few weeks later.

No one seems to doubt that SSP Adeel Chandio, a well-reputed officer who has been posted in Rao's place, wants to weed out the corruption in Malir police. (Although Rao was technically an SP, he had been given an SSP's charge — another perk of being an instrument of the deep state.) “I hold an open kachehri for two hours every day,” says SSP Adeel. “So firstly, I'm making the SSP's office more accessible to the public, and secondly I won't allow illegal activities in my area that harm either the government or the people”.

To that end, he says, he had 55 police personnel transferred out immediately since he came in, including all the SHOs in Malir.

(District Malir is the largest of Karachi's six districts and has 12 police stations. However, four police stations in district East and one in district West also fall under the SSP Malir's jurisdiction, making for a total of 17.)

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Malir's landscape ravaged by sand and gravel lifting, creating an environmental disaster. — White Star

However, clawing back control over the district requires far more than shuffling of police personnel. According to a senior police official, "Rao had a lot of ingress in Malir because he was posted there for so many years. His tentacles are all over the place. We don't know who is working for him."

Two cops that met *Dawn* on its recce deep inside Malir explained that the former SSP's touts continue to act as informants, keeping tabs on people's movements. "It will take SSP Chandio some time to understand the extent of Rao's network," says one of them. "Don't forget, he also inspired fierce loyalty in this area. After all, they were all beneficiaries to some extent. Some of his close associates in the police are still well placed in the police."

His colleague adds with a chuckle: "It's like getting the cat to watch the cream." Take for instance, Inspector Irfanullah Bangash who, say the local cops, oversees the sand and gravel mining racket in the dry riverbed of Malir river.

Rao Anwar's role in facilitating land-grabbing in an area where the sprawling gated communities of Bahria Town Karachi — at the behest of the Sindh PPP's top bosses — and DHA City Karachi — to curry favour with the powers that be — are coming up, is well known. His name and that of SHO Khan Nawaz, aside from certain retired military officials, are mentioned repeatedly by the many villagers who have been or are under threat of being evicted from the land they have farmed for generations.

Less known however, even though it has been around for much longer, is his stake in sand and gravel mining, a business so lucrative that it is termed *sona rati*, or gold sand. The activity has



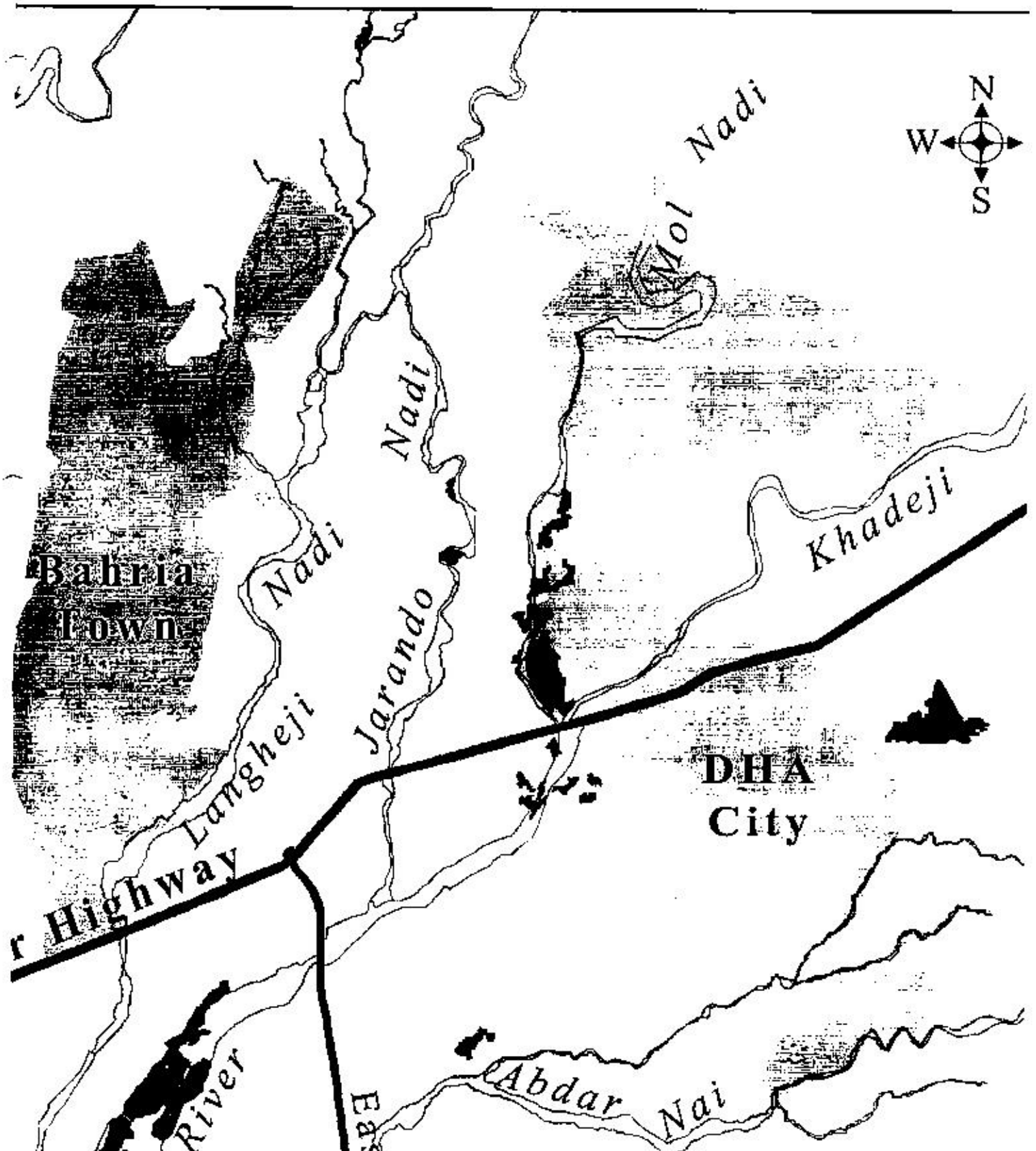
led to environmental devastation by lowering the water table to critical levels in many parts of the district and laying waste to what was once verdant farmland. Given that Malir is Karachi's green belt, the implications for the city as a whole are dire.

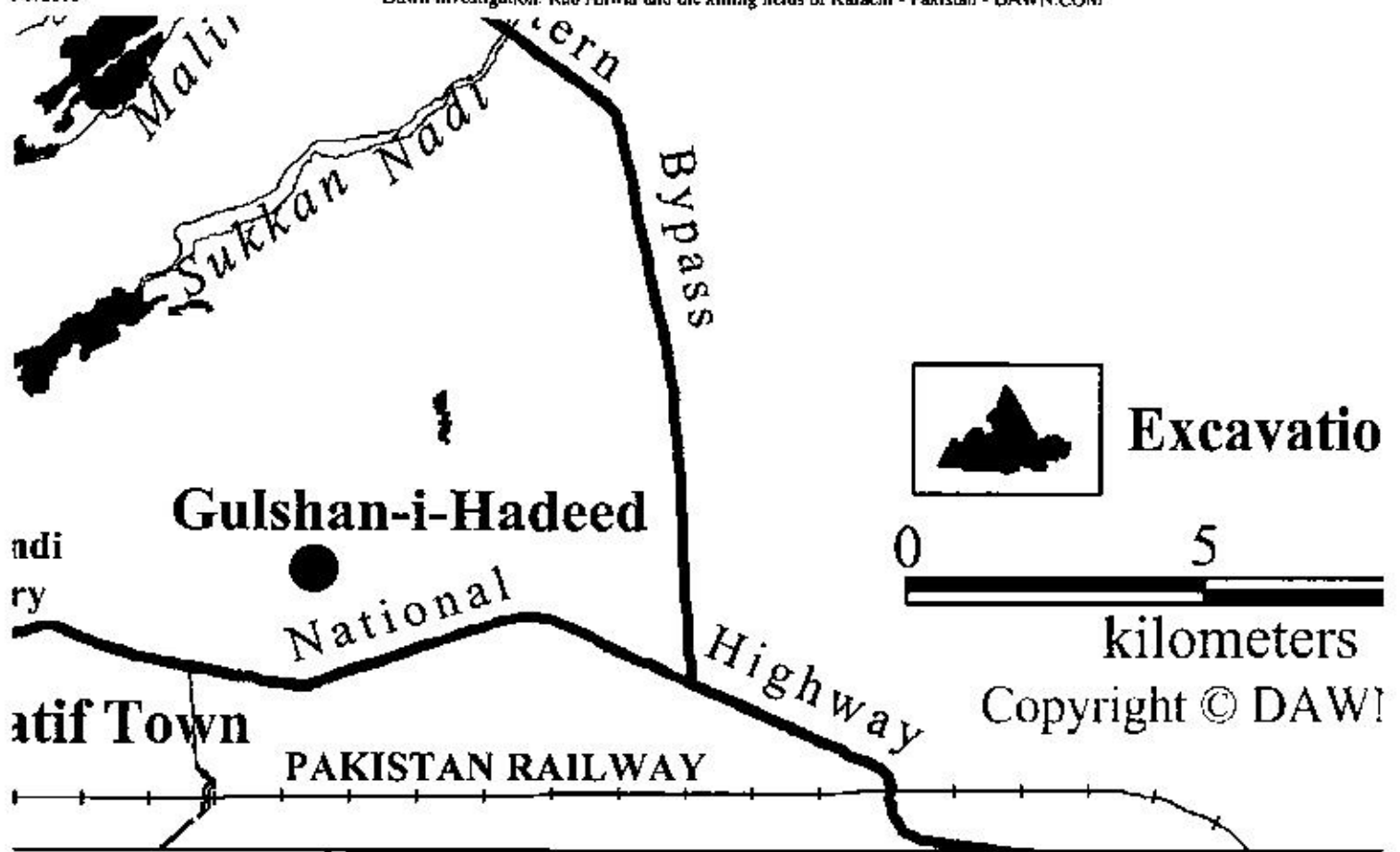
The landscape of Malir's Shah Latif Town where lifting of *reti bajri* is particularly common, has been permanently altered. Deep, humongous canyons have appeared in several places, the earth gouged out over the years by tens of thousands of excavators and dumpers.

These areas are known as *dhakkas*. Every evening, from 8 or 9pm until dawn, queues of dumpers line up near each *dhakka*; excavation machines remove the soil and transfer it to the dumpers that then transport it to holding areas or 'stocks' to be sold onward to various building sites. It takes up to five to six minutes to fill one dumper. Friday is the day off.

According to Asmatullah Khan, who was until recently involved in *reti bajri* mining himself, and local cops speaking to *Dawn* on condition of anonymity, the contractors and middlemen in the business — largely from the Pakhtun community — number in the thousands.

Each contractor pays the police up to Rs20,000 per night per dumper, regardless of the number of trips during the hours of work; there can be 100 dumpers removing earth from each *dhakka* per night.





Excavation of sand and gravel lifting in the district. — Dawn/GIS

Until Rao was suspended, 'beaters' attached with each police station collected the money that went straight to him and his political bosses. Policemen working the range were, according to their rank, also among the beneficiaries. Some local politicians took their cut too. "Each police station that falls in SSP Malir's jurisdiction makes between Rs400,000 to Rs500,000 per night," says Mr Khan. "And that's a conservative estimate. So you can imagine what Rao used to rake in."

Section 144 on the lifting of sand and gravel in Malir district has been in force since years. But with the district and the law-enforcement officials themselves the principal beneficiaries of the racket, who was there to prevent the ravaging of public land in the area?

Sources in the police say that the incoming SSP Malir has put a stop to the reti bajri work, but local cops insist that unbeknown to him, it is not entirely suspended; the gains far outweigh the risk. Dawn did come across some dhakkas where fresh tyre treads and excavator shovel marks are clearly visible.

The smuggling of Iranian petrol has been yet another lucrative source of income. An SP in district West explains why, against all logic, four police stations in district East — Sohrab Goth, Site, Sachal and Mobina Town — fall under the jurisdiction of SSP district Malir; so does Gulshan-i-Maymar in district West. "If you look on a map, the location of the five police stations forms a corridor from Hub through Malir to the east through which the smuggling can carry on unimpeded.



Fresh marks made by excavator shovels can be seen on the rock face. — White Star

It is not that Malir police is alone in its criminal pursuits — far from it. However, in Rao's case, that avarice is coupled with an utter disregard for human life, which is precisely what makes him such a useful instrument for the powers that be.

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Women in Kathore, Malir whose farms have been destroyed by the land mafia backed by the police.—White Star

Police authorities have disclosed that Rao made 74 trips to Dubai since he was appointed SSP Malir. That works out to almost one trip every month, a lifestyle that his salary of around Rs95,000 could scarcely have supported.

***Rao did not only derive his power from being the blue-eyed boy of the establishment, but also from his close connections with VVIPs in Sindh's political landscape. He was first elevated out of turn to SP less than a fortnight after Asif Zardari was sworn in as president.***

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A senior source in the Sindh government confirmed that on no occasion had Rao even sought ex-Pakistan leave — which is mandatory for government employees — to proceed abroad.

It is also worth questioning how FIA Karachi Airport under Deputy Director, Asim Qaimkhani, (FIA) posted as SSP in Sindh police until four years ago, could let him exit the country without the requisite paperwork. Instead, Rao's stint as SHO Airport thana meant that Jinnah International, with its khepias smuggling in all manner of contraband, held no surprises for him. Besides, the airport is located in district Malir.

Meanwhile, *Dawn* has also unearthed some details about Rao in Dubai. His *iqama* is issued to him as the *mehram* of his wife, Samina Anwar Ahmed Khan, and bars him from doing business in the Emirates.

Their three children — a son and two daughters — also legally live with her. Mrs Khan is described as a partner with Amar Ahmed Khan in the Dubai-based AAA Trading Company that should ostensibly deal in food and beverages but does no business.

Rao did not only derive his power from being the blue-eyed boy of the establishment, but also from his close connections with VVIPs in Sindh's political landscape. He was first elevated from Inspector to Deputy Superintendent Police in March 2008 and six months later to SP on Sep 18, 2008, less than a fortnight after Asif Zardari was sworn in as president. (The out of turn promotion was reversed in July 2013 by a court order.)

One interesting anecdote illustrates the extent to which even officials senior to him in the police hierarchy would defer to



Rao. A police contingent from Clifton raided an apartment belonging to a businessman who is now a senior PTI leader. The gentleman in question was with three sitting DIGs.

When the senior officials protested, the police party told them to contact Rao who told them bluntly that the individual had no choice but to go with the police. At this, the DIGs — two ranks senior to Rao at the time — asked the Clifton police to at least wait until they left the premises.

Nevertheless, however one looks at it, the buck stops with IG Sindh A.D Khowaja. As a result of the relentless campaign waged by civil society activists in the belief that Mr Khowaja can bring some order to policing in Sindh, the Supreme Court recently restored to him the power to transfer and post senior police officials in the province. The Sindh government had stripped him of that authority in order to hobble him so that their criminality in land matters, over sugar mills and in voter manipulation, etc could continue without hindrance.

While acknowledging that in many ways this present IG is an improvement on his predecessors, those in the know say that he has made many “compromises” with the province’s top bosses. According to a Sindh government official, “When the IG undertakes transfers and postings, he consults the CM, although he doesn’t need to. Thus he didn’t remove the SP Malir, nor the SSPs of Jamshoro, Khairpur, Larkana and Nawabshah, all the districts that are the PPP’s strongholds. All other SSPs were transferred.”

The case of SSP Jamshoro, Irfan Bahadur, is particularly interesting. Mr Bahadur was away for almost a year in the UK, while waiting to obtain a Tier 2 visa with his wife as the principal applicant. Despite his long absence from duty, he was, immediately upon his return, appointed SSP Jamshoro.

The Sindh government source divulged that it was Malik Riaz, chairman of Bahria Town, and close associate of Mr Zardari, “who had had Irfan Bahadur appointed to Jamshoro when he was expanding Bahria Town Karachi into that district.” Such is

the wheeling and dealing that has made Sindh police the handmaiden of a predatory state.

Villages have been raided by police in the middle of the night, the men beaten, taken away and booked under false charges or threatened with being killed in staged encounters if they didn't surrender their land. Not long ago a group of locals spoke with *Dawn* about how Rao's police have helped Bahria Town thugs terrorise the villagers.

"Bahria has been after us since 2008. They bulldozed the four wells on my family's farm and destroyed it. And police mobiles with covered number plates gave them protection," said Zarina Jokhio, her voice shaking with rage. "Where do we go for help if the police and local MPAs pay no heed to us?"

Meanwhile, what is likely to happen to the former SSP? Even now, says a senior police official, those concerned "aren't interested in prosecuting him. Their intention was only to remove him. The police, agencies, politicians have 100pc planned on getting him off scot-free."

Arguably though, Rao may have become a liability. Knowing too much can be dangerous.

*With additional reporting by Imran Ayub and Ishaq Tanoli.  
Some names have been changed for the sake of privacy.*

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