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eye for safety

Security systems are typically deployed with a goal of deterrence

SURVEILLANCE: THE SAFETY & SECURITY MANTRA

FAST FACT

NATIONS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC ARE INCREASINGLY RELYING UPON VIDEO SURVEILLANCE IN PROVIDING A SAFE CITY ENVIRONMENT, THE SINGAPORE MODEL BEING A SIGNAL EXAMPLE

Prevention through surveillance is the only way to control crime, right from the city level down to individual housing complexes.

NAMRATA KOHLI writes

Fear, suspicion, and insecurity define the way we move around in our cities today. The question is how we can resurrect our cities and neighbourhoods into the safe havens we were once used to — our neighbourhoods were certainly vastly safer during our childhood.

Prevention would appear to be our best bet in this endeavour and, to achieve this end, surveillance is the best tool in pre-empting the rise in urban crime.

Nations in the Asia Pacific are increasingly relying upon video surveillance in providing a safe city environment, the Singapore model being a signal example. Australia is another example where surveillance systems are protecting strategic public places. Security systems are typically deployed with a goal of deterrence, with 24x7 monitoring to prevent crime, as well as using surveillance technology to assist safety officers in responding to emergencies rapidly. The demand for gated communities is gaining popularity in India owing to security reasons. As all the houses are enclosed within a safe perimeter wall or fence, entry into the community can easily be monitored and controlled affording a great degree of security to the residents.

With their elaborate guardhouses and entrance architecture, gated communities all over the world are way more expensive than regular neighbourhoods. But, people are willing to pay more for a secured environment where they are safe and protected. It is a fact that crime rates decrease significantly in neighbourhoods with active video surveillance, which contributes to the increased value and safety of the properties.

The developers of gated communities and private townships take upon themselves the task of providing security. Nikhil Jain, the

CEO of Ramprastha Group, says: "Safety and security has become a major concern for developers as well as people living in residential colonies. The entire Ramprastha City will be monitored round the clock through CCTV cameras. All the security guards, domestic helps and drivers working in the society must go through police verification before their appointment." The group, which is developing Ramprastha City on Dwarka Expressway, also plans to organize periodic training and counselling sessions to the security guards deployed on their projects. Globally, gated communities are lapped up by urban

THE MUMBAI AND PUNE SURVEILLANCE PROJECTS PLAN TO HAVE THE CENTRAL C&C CENTRE INTERFACE WITH PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

elite who are high on money, and high on vulnerability too — the double-income working professionals, families with kids, the empty nesters, and the retirement-home communities.

Amit Vaidya, who has developed a retirement community called Golden Estate in Park Road, has laid special emphasis upon security elements. "In our retirement community, all external and internal public spaces are covered by a grid of 50 infrared cameras, strategically placed in every nook and corner to monitor the movement and location of senior citizens, which ensures

instant detection of security breaches or accidents. A specially-designed emergency response alarm system has been installed within the residential space which has three separate response teams: medical, electrical, and security units," Vaidya says. In addition, the boundary walls of the facility have security wiring along with cameras and strobe lights to detect and prevent any unauthorized intrusion.

There are many debates on gated communities. Real estate planners vote for building 'communities' rather than 'gates', emphasizing the idea of building bridges rather than walls. The very foundation of citizenship is rooted in sharing. While designing a township, the lines of security like gates that separate people from one another, are mostly hidden," Chris Connell, an architect with Foster Associates, says. "As a principle, this is underplayed," he avers.

But what makes the exercise meaningful is when, rather than creating forts and fortresses for only the urban elite, there is a holistic view to the problem of safety and security of the people and the entire city is protected.

This is when surveillance systems are executed at the level of city and then connected to individual private complexes.

"This is eminently possible," says Manish Shah, the VP (South East Asia) of Verint Systems, who has helped the Surat police in designing and deploying a command and control centre at their police headquarters.

"Today's video surveillance systems are based on IP standards, which makes it possible to have a central command and control system to connect with private neighbourhoods using a standard interface. Most private neighbourhood surveillance systems are privately operated and have their own control centres that can be



linked to a city control centre.

The Mumbai and Pune surveillance projects plan to have the central C&C Centre interface with private and public institutions. Chicago in the United States has an OEMC (Office of Emergency Management & Communications) Private Sector Camera Initiative to link non-public sector cameras into their system.

Recently, Surat became the first city to have a 24x7 video surveillance in place. Rakesh Ashana, the police commissioner of Surat, says, "This is an investment aimed to help ensure the safety of our people and bring greater awareness of security amongst our citizens."

Broadly, how does the Verint model of Safe City work? Specifically, what are the things that the

traffic department and the state police want to capture through the use of technology?

As a law-enforcement authority, police uses the command centre to detect and investigate traffic violations, monitor suspicious vehicles, and incidents of crime that are recorded on the CCTV cameras installed at strategic spots in the city.

Manish Shah says that, typically, a command and control centre is located in the police headquarters. The command centre receives live feed from over 100 cameras deployed at strategic high-traffic intersections and high-risk locations in the city; these video feeds are consolidated on a 280 sq ft video wall. In case of any potential threat or violations, the officer on duty immediately gets an alert and he can take

proactive action.

The physical security command center is capable of immediately notifying any constable in the city on a variety of law and order situations; appropriate steps related to traffic diversions, sending police vehicles or ambulances to trouble spots can also be taken using the alerts of this system.

However, the people handling this equipment must be thoroughly trained in the use of this technology and they must be competent. Experts caution that in video surveillance solutions, there is a need to educate the broader public about the benefits of this technology beforehand, as otherwise people may be apprehensive that the government is deploying the technology to curb their freedoms.

QUICK BITES

■ WITH THEIR ELABORATE GUARDHOUSES AND ENTRANCE ARCHITECTURE, GATED COMMUNITIES ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE WAY MORE EXPENSIVE THAN REGULAR NEIGHBOURHOODS

■ IT IS A FACT THAT CRIME RATES DECREASE SIGNIFICANTLY IN NEIGHBOURHOODS WITH ACTIVE VIDEO SURVEILLANCE, WHICH CONTRIBUTES TO THE INCREASED VALUE AND SAFETY OF THE PROPERTIES