



# kidnap & ransom

## India's burgeoning kidnapping industry

On 4 September 2007, a three-and-half-year-old boy – the son of two Indian IT professionals – was abducted from a school in the Kondapur area of Hyderabad. According to police reports, the child was kidnapped by two unidentified males, who, after scaling a school compound wall and befriending the child, snatched him and escaped in a black Toyota Qualis. The kidnapers reportedly demanded a Rs 1 crore ransom (equivalent to around £120,000) and although both police and family members denied making any payment, the child was released unharmed the following day. This kidnapping was the second such incident to hit Hyderabad's IT industry in three months. Back in July, a general manager at a consulting and IT solutions company was kidnapped in the Secunderabad area of the city as he dropped his children off at school. Although he was rescued by police a day later, that incident, and the abduction on 4 September, have rocked India's technology hubs and have highlighted the country's growing kidnap for ransom problem,



a problem that has significant implications for the growing number of multinational companies operating there.

India is swiftly moving up the list of the top ten countries for kidnapping, with an estimated 8,000 abductions now blighting the country each year. Widespread poverty, the growing gap between rich and poor, and the poorly-funded and under-manned nature of India's police force mean that kidnapping is an attractive tactic for a number of individuals and groups. Criminal groups operating at the behest of political personalities and parties, encouraged by the corrupt, regional and parochial nature of the country's political system, indulge in kidnapping in order to develop political leverage and generate campaign revenue. Other criminal gangs, motivated by the potential for making a substantial profit, are increasingly involved in kidnapping, particularly since it is known that in some parts of the country kidnapping is now more lucrative than drug trafficking. According to India's Minister for Home Affairs, Manikrao Gavit, there are over 700 kidnap-for-ransom gangs, with a total of nearly 4,300 members, currently operating in India. Many kidnap gangs are demonstrating an entrepreneurial and professional edge, emulating their more experienced contemporaries in Latin America by conducting extensive pre-operational surveillance and utilising specialist middlemen to collect ransom payments. In addition to the numerous criminal and political organisations conducting kidnappings, India also has



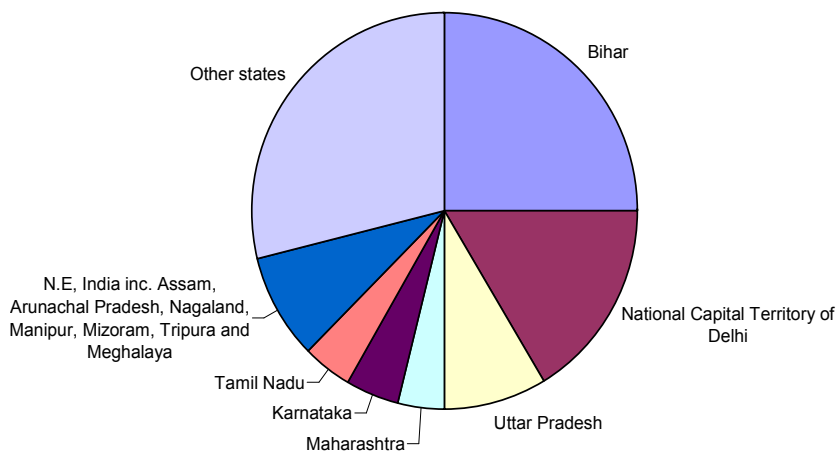
three main terrorist movements who compound the country's abduction problem. The separatist guerrilla organisation, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), operating in the north east of the country, various separatist and jihadist movements in Jammu and Kashmir, and Maoist Naxalites, who operate in Bihar, Jharkland, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh, all utilise kidnapping as a tactic in order to intimidate and coerce the local populace, embarrass and weaken the central government, make political demands and raise funds for their various military campaigns.

In terms of the distribution of kidnapping among India's regions, Bihar is by far the most dangerous state, accounting for nearly a quarter of all abductions in the country. According to Bihar state officials, over 2,000 people were kidnapped in the populous and impoverished state in the first half of 2007 alone, and officials admit that this may be only the tip of the iceberg as victims and their families have little or no confidence in the authorities, and only report a fraction of incidents to the police. The interior states of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh are also prime areas for abductions.

These heavily populated but underdeveloped states are a haven for organised criminal activity, and according to local sources kidnapping in these areas is well on its way to becoming a cottage industry. In 2006, there were nearly 1,300 kidnappings in the state of Delhi and over 700 in Uttar Pradesh. High levels of kidnapping also blight the states of Maharashtra, home to Mumbai, Karnataka, home to Bangalore, and Tamil Nadu, home to the city of Chennai. These three states have already seen over 600 kidnappings in 2007.

Currently, India's kidnapers tend to favour targets at the lower end of the economic and social scale. This trend is driven primarily by accessibility – gangs tend to live in neighbourhoods where the victims reside and know where comparative wealth and vulnerability lie – and because victims from poorer socio-economic backgrounds attract less media and police interest. As in Latin America, the majority of victims are often the dependents of the head of the household, such as children, wives and extended family. The reason for this is that the head of the household has quickest and easiest access to the largest amount of money. Failure

**Regional breakdown of Kidnappings in India**



to pay the ransom often has brutal repercussions. In such circumstances, the victim is often killed or sold into the sex industry. This is especially true in the case of female and child victims. There have also been reports of child kidnap victims being sold for adoption and of adult victims being sold for their organs.

However, even though abductions principally impact on those Indians living at the lower end of the economic spectrum, there is evidence that kidnapers are now beginning to target growing numbers of business personnel. In 2006, thirteen percent of kidnap victims in India were classified as business people and this percentage is only likely to rise as India's middle class grows. In addition, any move towards targeting the middle-class will endanger the growing numbers of foreign nationals operating in India. Historically, it has been rare for foreign expatriates to be kidnapped, apart from in Jammu and Kashmir where several militant groups have abducted foreigners as a mechanism to facilitate the release of jailed comrades. However, foreign nationals are likely to increasingly fall foul of Indian kidnapers, who are becoming ever more sophisticated and bolder and who realise that multinational employees, many of whom have kidnap insurance, represent a potentially large pay day.

India will continue to provide a productive environment for those involved in kidnapping for ransom. Kidnap gangs are always going to thrive when they can draw on a large, disenfranchised and impoverished population for recruits, and when they operate against a poorly-funded, over-stretched, incompetent and corrupt police force. And, with India's booming economy continuing to attract an influx of foreign companies and expatriate professionals, the corporate sector and its employees will provide an increasingly rich environment in which India's kidnap gangs can operate. Companies and employees that carry a high-profile or that are known to have access to large amounts of cash or sensitive information and technology, will be especially vulnerable. As a consequence of this existing and growing threat, red24 advises all companies operating in India to regularly review the security procedures and arrangements for their management and expatriate personnel, and to encourage their employees to be proactive about personal security awareness.



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Lee Niblett, Senior Analyst at red24 assesses the threat to locals and foreigners in India from kidnapping. For more information on the support available for clients operating in the region, please contact [customerenquiry@red24.info](mailto:customerenquiry@red24.info)

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