

'Organised gangs' behind rise in business robberies

SA's business sector, particularly smaller enterprises, has lost millions of rand in the first eight months of this year as organised gangs target bank customers in possession of large sums of cash.

By Trevor Neethling 19 Sep 2012

A total of 717 robberies have taken place across the country since January, the CEO of the South African Banking Risk Information Centre, Kalyani Pillay, and police said yesterday in a media briefing. SA's high crime rate continues to have a negative effect on business.

The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2012-13 cited crime and theft among the problematic factors when conducting business in SA.

Robberies against businesses is a trend that is likely to indicate a significant rise in crimes against businesses when the South African Police Service releases the 2011 crime statistics tomorrow.

Gauteng police commissioner Mzwandile Petros said while the province had seen a 38% decrease in associated robberies, Gauteng still experienced the majority of national incidents.

"We are now seeing a displacement of this crime to other provinces," he said, referring to KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. The Institute of Security Studies' Lizette Lancaster said because so much business crime-fighting initiatives were centred around Gauteng, there was likely to be a rise in other provinces.

Despite announcing a decrease in the number of serious crimes reported to the police last year, robberies at businesses rose 0.9%, a rise of 133 cases to 14.667.

Pillay said from continuing investigations the South African Banking Risk Information Centre had learned that organised gangs were behind these robberies against businesses.

"In the 717 cases reported, not one bank staff member was arrested in connection to the robberies," she said.

The majority of the robberies had taken place in Gauteng, followed by KwaZulu-Natal, the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape.

She said small businesses were especially vulnerable to associated robberies because of their preference to withdraw large sums of money to, for example, pay staff or buy stock.

Pillay warned that criminal elements within these businesses were able to pick up inside information on the banking patterns and pass on the information to syndicates.

Source: *Business Day*

