

## London crime

# Indian elite complains about luxury watch thefts in Mayfair

GEORGE PARKER — NEW DELHI

WILLIAM WALLIS — LONDON

While negotiators in London and New Delhi haggle over a bilateral trade deal, India's business elite has been raising a very different concern: the fear of being mugged in Mayfair.

David Lammy, shadow foreign secretary in the UK's opposition Labour party, is in the Indian capital for talks on geopolitics and commerce but yesterday he had his ear bent over the risks of Rolex watch thefts in the British capital.

Devin Narang, a renewable energy entrepreneur, listed crime in London as one of the biggest concerns for India's chief executive class at a meeting between Lammy and business people.

"People are being mugged in the heart of London — in Mayfair," said Narang, a member of the executive committee of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

"All CEOs in India have had an experience of physical mugging and the police not responding," he said.

London's Metropolitan Police did not respond to a request for comment.

Figures for "theft from a person", a category that includes snatching watches, handbags and mobile phones, rose 27 per cent across London in the year ending December 2023, according to police data.

In the borough of Westminster, which includes Mayfair, cases of theft from a person rose 40 per cent last year compared with 2022. Police reported a spate of mobile phone and watch snatching carried out by moped and e-bike gangs.

Even allowing for a degree of exaggeration, British officials confirmed that the prospect of being mugged on London's streets — and losing Rolex watches and other luxury goods — ranked alongside immigration delays at Heathrow as a constant bugbear of India's elite.

Narang said: "Indians do carry expensive things but the police not responding is a matter of concern."

He understood attacks often took place in Mayfair, citing cases of people having expensive bags stolen or watches being cut off wrists in the street.

"London is a walking city," Narang said. "You don't want to look over your shoulder all the time. You don't want to go to a city where you're likely to be mugged in the streets."

"It doesn't make you feel comfortable. You can walk anywhere in Delhi and you won't be mugged."

Police were often uninterested in such crimes or slow to respond, he said.

The Met has previously said that specialist undercover units targeting crime hotspots in three central London boroughs had reduced watch robberies during a six-month operation in 2023 to 361 from 429 the year before.

Lammy said the issue of crime in London had been raised several times during his short spell in the Indian capital. He added that "security and fighting crime" would be priorities for Labour under Sir Keir Starmer if the party won the general election expected this year.

The discussions came as Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, and Rishi Sunak, UK prime minister, attempt to agree a bilateral trade deal ahead of Indian elections in April and May.