

Police study new measures to protect car rental companies

Some use these vehicles in crimes such as robberies, illegal alcohol trading, and illegal car pooling

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Dubai: An increase in unpaid traffic fines by vehicle leasing companies and rented cars being used to commit crimes have prompted Dubai Police to conduct a study, which will soon force changes in the sector.

Lieutenant Colonel Ahmad Thani Bin Galita, Director of the Crime Prevention Department of Dubai Police, said many car renting companies are dealing with mounting unpaid traffic fines incurred by the customers.

"Every commercial area in Dubai has many car leasing companies. There are around 945 registered car leasing companies in Dubai. A number of suspects have used their vehicles to commit crimes [such as the Wafi heist in 2007], smuggling the vehicles to neighbouring countries, dismantling parts of the car and selling it in the market," he said.

He said such crimes and violations can make a company go bankrupt. This calls for strict rules to be implemented that will protect the companies and the customer.

Earlier, car rental companies had the authority to hold a customer's passport until a ministerial circular abolished the rule. Now, they only charge a specific amount on a credit card while clients have the vehicle, said Lt Col Bin Galita.

Fake address

"Based on our investigations and meetings with car rental owners, this rule is not sufficient to protect their rights. They have faced a number of incidents where the credit cards were fake, it didn't have enough credit, or the credit card belongs to someone other than the customer," he said.

Some vehicles are smuggled and parts are sold to mislead police from tracing the vehicle, he said.

Some customers using the addresses of fake companies to use these vehicles in crimes such as robberies, illegal alcohol trading, and illegal car pooling.

The study also outlined one of the methods motorists use to rob rented vehicles. They follow the formal and legal procedure in renting a car and later make copies of the car key.

They return the vehicle on the agreed date and later sneak into the area where the cars are parked to steal the vehicles, said Lt Col Bin Galita.

The study also focused on violations committed by the companies. Some companies lease motorists vehicles who registration have expired. Fines incurred by motorists are therefore not paid. "And the bigger problem is that car leasing companies don't operate on a unified contract with motorists. Every car leasing company has its own rules with some leasing vehicles to illegal residents or without taking the full details of the customer," said Lt Col Bin Galita.

Solutions

The Crime Prevention Department of Dubai Police introduced around 21 suggestions and solutions to the challenges and crimes faced by car leasing companies and customers.

The main solution is establishing a unified database across the country that obligates the car leasing companies to provide their full details as well as the full details of the customer such as the date of contract, period, recent photo of the motorist, photo of the rented car, and copy of the original passport.

This data base should be linked and assessable to police units across UAE and entry and exit points in the country so that any visitor leaving the country will be listed in the system if she/he had rented a car during their visit and if the vehicle is returned to the company and all traffic fines have been paid, said Lt Col Bin Galita.

Another suggestion is to have the colour of the plate number of rented vehicles different than other private vehicles so that it could be distinguished by police patrol units, he said.

Records

Further, companies leasing luxury cars should contact the police to check on the customer's records and passport, he said. "We also recommend registering traffic fines on the customer's driving licence rather than on the rented vehicle. That way the clients know they are paying for their traffic fines and the companies won't have to face mounting traffic fines," said Lt Col Bin Galita.