

Fear fest

BY IMRAN HUSAIN

Incredibly the family felt safer in not informing the police rather than doing so. Is this not a compelling tale of total mistrust?

Even as almost the entire nation celebrated the onset of 2005 and the festivities of the wedding season, those dregs of society, the thieves and dacoits continued their rampage. Encouraged by a non-performing, inept and corrupt police force these horrors operate without fear or hindrance. Their intelligence is so powerful that phone numbers, car numbers and complete details of the victims are on their fingertips. The festivities turned into a fear fest for one Karachi family that was unfortunate to be a victim on the evening of January 2, 2005. What a traumatic beginning to the New Year!

Soon after Maghrib prayer as the head of the family returned from the Masjid, he was waylaid at the main door of the house and brought down to the ground roughly by three men. The noise created by the fall and the banging door alarmed the womenfolk of the house. The wife and two daughters, sitting in the living room got up to witness the gentleman being manhandled at the door by men brandishing knives and guns.

Another daughter was in her bedroom and upon hearing the noise queried what was happening. Her younger sister rushed into the room and tried to shut the door. The men rushed there and threw the door open and the two young girls were caught by their hair and shoved to the floor and knives placed across their throats while they were menacingly warned not to utter a word or else they would have their throats slit. The rest of the family was brought into the room and hands and legs tied, they too were made to sit on the floor.

With professional precision all the windows and doors of the house were locked and the curtains closed. All the keys were asked for and collected. The father who was mercilessly pounded on the face was placed on the bed and tied. His eye beginning to hemorrhage internally, and blood flowed from the cuts on his face. Horrified, the ladies began to scream. The mother and one daughter were taken to the bedroom and the cupboards were opened and valuables removed.

They were then brought back to the daughter's room where they were all confined. Two men then took the father to his room while one stood guard. Suddenly the father was heard making a throttled screaming noise as if his throat had been slit and the sound was so eerie that it blew the ladies' mind. They heard the door of the room being slammed shut and then utter silence. They feared the worst! All of them breaking out into prayer at once, hoping against hope.

The four ladies tried to keep the man that was guarding them talking. He was talkative, telling them that they had spent two years in jail on a murder charge and had been recently released. One of their buddies was still locked up and they needed money

bers, car number and all details of movements of the residents.

It was an hour before the door to the parents' room was opened again, and to their utter disbelief and happiness the family could hear the voice of the father. There was such relief that he was still alive. By then the intruders had collected almost everything that the family possessed, jewelry, televisions, stereos, CD player, CDs, cosmetics, perfumes, handbags, unstitched material, shoes, slippers, shirts, cash and whatever else you can care to think of. Then two of them brought the father into the room. His head was bandaged with a dupatta and bleeding. They had the rusted, jagged blade knife with which they had superficially cut his scalp!

In an attempt to get them out of the house quickly one of the daughters handed them the car keys which they loaded with the stolen goods. Two of the men then got into the car and left but the one guarding the ladies stayed. The family tried to get him to leave but he kept threatening them that they dare not tell anyone or they would be killed. He waited twenty-five minutes and muttering that by now the goods would have been delivered, he left. One of the girls whose hands were loosely knotted then released herself and all her family. One of them rushed and locked the open doors. As they examined the rooms and saw the ruin before them, they could only thank Almighty Allah that they were alive!

Once they were able to find additional wire and restore the cut telephone connection, they rang a good family friend, scared that their phone was tapped; they requested him to provide them with a cell phone. The fact that the dacoits knew their telephone number by heart and that they were being watched terrified them. They begged the friend not to inform the police as it would be of no use and it was likely to endanger them.

How citizens of this city are supposed to sleep peacefully is beyond me. Armed guards abound, huge walls have been built, padlocks are used, windows are grilled, alarms have been installed, the atmosphere is like a fort under siege and yet, right under the nose of the police, this horrific trend continues unabated. There is a lesson to be learnt from this story. Incredibly the family felt safer in not informing the police rather than doing so. Is this not a compelling tale of total mistrust in that law enforcement agency? And if we accept it to be so, then is it not incumbent upon the government to give us a force that can protect us and our property as is the basic covenant of the state?

It is not enough to say that this happens everywhere. If it happens in London and New York, then there are consequences. There is a full scaled investigation by the investigation arm of the police, the district attorney's office, the FBI, Scotland Yard and allied law enforcement agencies as may be appropriate. Offenders, more often than not, get caught, they are tried and they are sentenced. What percentage ever gets caught here? Just the fact that some are caught would be enough to create a level of security that allows free thought and a happy conducive atmosphere. No one will deny that living itself is a risk but every citizen wants to know that the law is out there thinking for them, protecting them.

Take a quick look at what has recently been happening around us. Two sessions' judges were kidnapped over a month ago and there is no sign of them. A policeman kills an under-trial prisoner in a court room. Archaic criminals, handcuffed and shackled, escape from police custody. Police kills people in Kambhar Ali Khan during an agitation. It is endless. All we hear of is police reforms. When are we going to get a "reformed" police?

Our leaders do not feel secure on the roads. This is evident by the near paralysis in any city they visit. Every government functionary travels with police escort vans and some even outriders. Is this not evidence of failure on the part of the police? Even given the adverse circumstances created by the war against terror, should we not be able to create a semblance of order in our cities. It was New York that was targeted by 9/11 but go there now and you see a city back to near normal. Despite Bush's harangues the much acclaimed energy once again pounds the pavements, the stores and the night life.

If I was unfortunate enough to be one of the senior police officials, I would dig a deep hole in the ground and bury myself in it. I certainly would not be making proclamations with my honey and sugar coated tongue to either the press or the nation's bosses stating that things are under control. I would fear the sack just as this family had to fear for their

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They just wanted peace and to forget the horror of the evening. An hour later, the phones started. Every thirty minutes, threatening and terrifying. Checking on whether the police had been informed. At six in the morning, almost twelve petrifying hours after the invasion, the dacoits called and informed the family where the car was standing and should be collected!

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So while we extend heartfelt sympathies to this unfortunate family and hundreds like them that have suffered a similar ordeal, we, at least, should bow our heads in shame and tell them, "sorry this happened, but nothing can be done".

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