

Anyone. Anywhere...

Heavy price for untrained, cheap security

The recent murder of Pallavi Purkayastha, a lawyer living in a supposedly secure Mumbai high-rise reminds us of the need to take precautionary steps to protect our loved ones.

One such step is to hire only licensed manned guarding service providers to keep your buildings safe. As per the Private Security and Regulation Act, 2005, each security guard must receive 160 hours of training and be police verified before being deployed. The Act also stresses on the need to ensure all wage benefits, including minimum wages, bonus and gratuity are paid to security officers. A well-trained and satisfactorily compensated security guard is more likely to understand the importance of his role in securing the residents of the building.



Pallavi Purkayastha's murder in a supposedly well-protected Mumbai highrise by a man meant to guard her is a wake-up call for women who are home alone in Calcutta apartments, where security means trusting mostly untrained personnel and untested surveillance systems.

Pritha Roy, who lives in a highrise off the EM Bypass, thought she was safe within a gated community until she learnt who killed corporate lawyer Pallavi and how.

"One chooses a complex over a standalone apartment mainly for security. Now when you hear that safety isn't guaranteed even there, what do you do? It's scary," Pritha told Metro.

The security arrangements in Pritha's apartment complex include CCTV surveillance, restricted entry for outsiders, intercom facility and routine identity checks for employees. But how do you plan for someone like Sajid Pathan, the guard who so elaborately planned his entry into Pallavi's 16th floor apartment in the dead of night?

According to **Ashit Luthra, director of G.I. Security**, women living alone in Calcutta highrises are "extremely vulnerable" to security threats. Luthra lost his wife Ravinder Kaur in 2007 when their domestic help Nikku Yadav, who had been working for them for seven years, strangled and smothered her with a pillow when she was alone at her Ballygunge Circular Road apartment. He fled with some cash and gold ornaments.

"About 90 per cent of the highrises in the city employ unlicensed security agencies. The guards are not properly trained, leaving the residents at the mercy of people who might not deserve their trust," **Luthra** said.

According to the Private Security Agency (Regulations) Act, 2005, it is mandatory for all security agencies set up after 2005 to be licensed by the state home department.

"There are around 3,500 private security agencies but only 1,000 of them are registered ones. Many of the guards employed by the agencies are untrained and that is the root of the problem," said Kumar Vikram Singh, chairman of the Central Association of Private Security Industry.

Pallavi's murder has jolted the police in Mumbai and Delhi into action, but Calcutta has yet to see any such crackdown on unlicensed security agencies that cater to budget-conscious housing complex committees across town.

The last time unlicensed agencies had come under the scanner was after the murder of an elderly woman in her apartment at an Ultadanga housing estate on July 27, 2011.

Like Ravinder and Pallavi, 93-year-old Shanta Bhattacharya was the victim of a plot hatched by someone she had trusted — the security supervisor of Bidhan Nivas.

The police investigation revealed that the mastermind of the crime was an employee of an unlicensed security agency.

The lack of initiative by the police to make security agencies and other domestic service providers accountable means that women living alone either by choice or out of compulsion are dependent on people who might prove to be untrustworthy.

"Can anything be worse than knowing that our dear ones are in the care of people we cannot trust?" said Arati Roy, who is having sleepless nights thinking about her elderly mother living alone in a south Calcutta highrise.

There has been no known survey yet by the police to ascertain how many women live alone in Calcutta, where their number continues to grow with the city expanding every year.

"Apart from young women who stay in the city to study or work, there are so many elderly women who are forced to stay alone for various reasons. The presence of a couple of guards where they stay is no guarantee of safety," said the general manager of a firm specialising in home security.

Another modern trend fraught with danger is of night-shift employees going back to homes that are not locked from inside. "My wife and child are asleep by 11pm and I don't return until well past midnight. The door is not bolted from inside so that I can use the key to get in without having to wake up anyone. Sometimes it scares me to think: what if?" said a call centre employee.

Reliability and accountability of guards apparently come at a price that many housing complexes are unable or unwilling to pay. The easy way out is to enlist the services of unlicensed firms that provide "cheap" security.

"The guards in my complex are unfit, elderly people who sleep through the night. I often reach home from work late at night and find them snoozing," said a young woman who works in Sector V and stays in Teghoria.

According to **Luthra of G.I. Security**, most private guards in Calcutta are paid much less than what their counterparts in the other cities earn. "These guards are sometimes forced to take up a second job to increase their income, as a result of which they can't concentrate on either," he said.

A security official said police inaction was only partly responsible for the proliferation of unlicensed agencies. "Pallavi's murder is a reminder that no security arrangement is foolproof, but the least that apartment buildings can do is hire trained guards," he added.

TIPS TO STAY SAFE IN APARTMENT BUILDINGS

<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">DO</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Check the licence of a private security agency before hiring■ Get the licence verified by the police■ Tell the agency to deposit details of guards with nearest police station 	 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Pallavi Purkayastha, who was murdered by a guard in her Mumbai apartment last Thursday</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Install a safety chain on the door■ Check with guards through intercom about unknown visitors 	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">DON'T</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Open the door to a stranger■ Allow unrestricted access to plumbers and electricians■ Close the main door when a vendor is working inside your house so that you are not locked inside with a stranger■ Spread the word that you stay alone■ Forget to bolt the door from inside even after the auto lock is in place■ Keep the keys where anyone can see them  
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Keep a peep hole on the main door   <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Install video phones, if possible, to check the identity of a visitor before opening the door	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Hire a security agency that has personnel trained for CCTV surveillance 	

Source: Security agencies

Courtesy: Metro, The Telegraph, Monday, 13th August, 2012.

Meet our new Directors



Mr. Jasbir Singh Wasu

Mr. Jasbir Singh Wasu graduated with a B.A. (Mil. Sc.) from Meerut University and has a PG Diploma in Personnel Management from YMCA Institute of Management. He founded the Securagrup in 1972 and is an advisor to Scientific Security Management Services Pvt. Ltd. He has also served as a former Corporate Director of Eagle Hunter Solutions Ltd. Mr. Wasu has handled ventures like advisory/execution services to the Ministry of Home, for their Indo-Pak Border residents' identification cards pilot project and designed the high-security identification & access cards for the President's House security during former USSR President Mr. Gorbachev's visit. He had the distinction of a personal presentation to the Minister of Home, Government of UK, and was awarded the Veterans Award by the International Institute of Security & Safety Management in 2003.

Dr. Aquil Busrai graduated in commerce with a distinction. He obtained his MBA from Xavier Labour Relations Institute. He later passed LLB and did an advanced diploma course in Training and Development. A university rank holder, he was awarded the Bharucha Gold Medal for academic excellence. Dr. Busrai has 39 years' experience in industry. He has worked in various HR roles with Unilever in Kenya and India and was Executive Director HR Motorola for the Asia-Pacific. Last year, he was adjudged amongst the "most powerful HR professionals in India" at the Asia-Pacific HRM Summit in Singapore. He was also bestowed the "Lifetime Achievement Award" at the Top Rankers Meet in Kuala Lumpur. His last assignment was with IBM India Limited as Executive Director Human Resources. He is now CEO of Aquil Busrai Consulting.



Dr. Aquil Busrai

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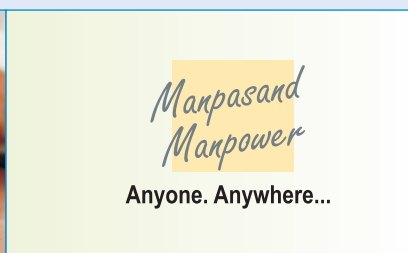
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