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Is Delhi a police state?

The common man faces constant harassment from the city police, says J BHAN

BC— aage barh," the machine-gun brandishing policeman told him in response to his "Bhai sahab kya..." while he was trying to find a place in the overcrowded parking lot at Delhi Police Headquarters. Knowing that there was no other place to park, he was scared stiff while another policeman strutted menacingly towards him almost as if he would crush his way through the car. But this one said, more decently, "Oye. Chal aage barh."

He had gone there to meet a senior police officer as the sub-inspector in the area he was staying in was harassing him in connection with the verification for his passport. He was told by friends that he had been foolish not to have offered the SI his usual tip for the work. He had called up this senior officer at the headquarters to seek his help.

He told the senior officer how abusive and threatening the SI had been. The SI had not found him home when he came to visit him, and was blatantly abusive over that. Then, the SI wanted him to visit him at the police station but would not confirm any time. The SI threatened to get his passport cancelled. On calling up the senior official, he was immediately given an appointment. Two minutes into the meeting he was given another rebuke, "We do this as a favour to you. You should cooperate with us." Meekly he walked out of the office, planning to emigrate.

She had an accident and was in hospital, a serious condition, but the policeman who visited to take her version asked her to pay for the visit. This request was declined and a journalist friend informed of the 'obnoxious' event. The journalist said this was not newsworthy; it was normal!

He made his last attempt to convince himself that the Delhi police was meant to serve the people. Some hooligans had started playing outside his flat, almost going on a rampage with their cricket ball. Having failed to persuade them to stop, he called up



the Police Control Room. The Gypsy was there in a short time. The police left after a warning. The game soon restarted! He called up the control room again. Again, the same patrol car came but the policemen, this time, gave him some strange logic of how the earth belonged to everyone so playing was okay. They left threatening to file a case against him for making fake calls to the control room. He told them that they were only encouraging the goons by their attitude! And the goon did commit a crime later.

It is customary for policemen to stop vehicles on the road without provocation and often they have no name-badges. They also refuse to show their identity cards. A good way to take bribes and not get caught! This also results in the criminally inclined posing as the police.

Ironically, one of the biggest traffic hazards is the Delhi police! They have killer bar-

riers which make it impossible to lane drive. Their being non-flourescent and non-crushable makes them extremely dangerous road-blocks to vehicles. Whenever I read in the newspaper about a speeding vehicle crushing a policeman, I cannot but wonder how many times I have almost had a heart-attack because of the police suddenly jumping in the middle of the road expecting my car to stop instantly.

Despite this, there is little doubt that the Delhi police continues to be one of the better ones. At other places, the police run their areas as personal fiefdoms. It certainly is one of the more efficient government departments. But Police Commissioner Ajay Raj Sharma has an uphill task ahead if he wants to make changes, as he says, to improve the police. And the work has to start as close as the 'frontyard' of the headquarters!

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In the name of Allah