

MUMBAI MIRROR | PRINT VIEW

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Reality show at CST

'Abandoned' by husband, ailing woman and daughter live on platform for a week before being spotted and rescued by an alert Railway Protection Force cop monitoring CCTVs

Binoo Nair

Among other responsibilities, Railway Protection Force (RPF) sub-inspector Sandeep Pawar monitors the images captured by closed circuit television cameras placed in various parts of Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST). That was what he was doing on Monday around 1 pm when the image on one of the four monitors caught his eye.

It was that of a lady and a teenaged girl.

Pawar was certain that he had seen them before. On a hunch, he decided to go through the video archives. Turned out he was right. He had seen them at the same spot on the concourse [near the platforms for long-distance trains] a week back.

Intrigued, he took a closer look at what they were up to.

"I realised that the lady and her daughter had been there for some days. When I zoomed in, I could make out that the lady had some problem with her legs. The teenager was present by her side most of time," says Pawar.

He informed his boss senior inspector B K Pandey who told him to investigate — are they passengers? where are they headed? when? If not, what are they doing here?

On making enquiries, Pawar found out that the lady was the girl's mother.

Khurshida Bano and her daughter Kulsum are from Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh. Khurshida was discharged a week back from KEM Hospital after surgery on her legs. Her husband had then left them at CST and reportedly went back to Azamgarh to arrange for some money. They were waiting for him to return.

They were penniless and Kulsum would occasionally step out to beg for food and look for work, possibly as a domestic help, nearby. She had failed to find any work.

The first thought that struck Pawar was that the duo was a perfect target for flesh traders and human traffickers.

He reverted to Pandey who also came to the duo and again made enquiries. The cops then contacted two students of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) who were undertaking a project in CST.

After speaking to the women, the students came to the conclusion that their mentor Sujata Jagtap, a member of NGO Prayas, would be the best person to help the women.



Senior Inspector B K Pandey (right), with sub-inspector Sandeep Pawar checking images of CST taken via CCTVs installed there. It was Pawar's sharp eye that spotted the two women on the platform



Khurshida Bano and her daughter Kulsum who had made station their home since a week

The women had not been very forthcoming with the cops, giving just the bare details, but spoke longer to Jagtap and the students.

Finally, four hours after Pawar first noticed them on Monday, Jagtap got the women shifted to the safe confines of King George Shelter in Mahalaxmi.

The cops called up at a contact number that Khurshida gave them of her native Azamgarh, but failed to get a response.

She said that is the only number she knows. Illiterate, she is unable to give her residential address or other details.

Cops fear that Khurshida's husband may have abandoned them.

They are safe for now, but cops are now wondering in whose custody they should be released once Khurshida's condition improves.

- It is a perfect scenario for human trafficking. The duo have become destitute, the daughter goes out looking for a job, smooth-talkers come and promise help and before you know it they will end up in some red-light area. Full credit to Pawar for his sharp eye

Senior inspector B K Pandey

- Prayas and TISS have been rendering this kind of service for seven years at CST. It is good that we managed to rescue the two. The mother told us that some people repeatedly tried to make small talk with her daughter but somehow they managed to fend off the men. The two are in our Mahalaxmi shelter and the mother will be operated upon in KEM Hospital on September 1
- Sujata Jagtap, social worker, TISS**



A policeman comes to question the woman after the Railway Protection Force spots her on their CCTV



A social worker talks to Khurshida and Kulsum to find out more about their background