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Helen Clark's house 'tagged'

Top-level security review follows incidents
 By JONATHAN MARSHALL - Sunday News | Sunday, 30 December 2007

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A top-level review into security around the home of Prime Minister Helen Clark has been carried out after a robber managed to flee a crime scene and hide in her back yard.

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In another incident, Diplomatic Protection Squad cops were left red-faced when a group of taggers managed to graffiti Clark's house, where she lives with husband Peter Davis, and other residences in the upmarket Auckland suburb of Mt Eden.

DPS head Inspector Terry O'Neill confirmed to Sunday News that a "substantial" number of homes in Cromwell Ave had been tagged in August.

Despite a home next door to the PM being rented for protection squad officers, no one was caught during the graffiti incident.

"It does illustrate the difficulty of responding quickly, even when we are close by, but we do try and employ the best methods possible," O'Neill said.

He refused to say if Clark or her husband were present when the tagging happened.

One neighbour told Sunday News he "couldn't believe" his home had been attacked when specialised police staff were in the neighbourhood watching the PM's home.

"What were they doing when this was going on?" he asked.

In the incident which first brought security concerns to light, a Dominion Rd superette was robbed in broad daylight and the offender ran away on foot and jumped into the PM's garden.

While there sources say the man managed to change clothes in a bid to avoid capture.

"What we have learned is the need to maintain constant vigilance of her property," O'Neill said.

He said the incidents had been "regrettable" and "embarrassing", prompting a review of the Prime Minister's security.

Clark, who is on holiday, was not available for comment but a source said she was fuming over the breaches.

O'Neill refused to discuss details of the review but when Sunday News visited the PM's \$720,000 residence last week there was no sign of a police presence and entering the property would not have been difficult.

"That is because the Prime Minister is away," O'Neill said.

National leader John Key whose \$6.8m Parnell home was burgled in July last night said news of Clark's security review was alarming.

"It is pretty staggering that she has such a high level of security yet someone is able to use her section like a changing room in a clothing shop," Key said.

Danny Thompson, co-director of Paragon Investigations specialists in close protection said Clark's security was "world class" but admitted the most recent breaches "are not something you would want to have happen during your watch".

He said the DPS was likely to be concerned with the safety of Clark more than her property.

In April, Clark's office confirmed the Labour leader's close protection had intensified after unwanted approaches by members of the Exclusive Brethren.

Until then she had not required a security escort while walking from her Beehive office to Parliament.

She is now routinely shadowed by two or more DPS staff.

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