

MESSAGE FROM MUMBAI: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON HATE CRIMES AND LEGAL ACTION

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Women - Schemes & their Performance, Mechanisms, Laws Institutions and Bodies

Purveyors of hate, misogyny and xenophobia have been on a boundless revelry in India, online and offline, with near total impunity and often times with support from politicians and the police. In the midst of such pervasive police apathy, the swift action by the Mumbai police in tracing and [arresting three persons](#) linked to the latest incident involving [a fake online 'auction' of Muslim women](#) gives hope that all is not lost. The Mumbai police action also contrasts with [the inaction of the Delhi police](#), who come under the Union Home Ministry, and the Noida police in Uttar Pradesh, a BJP-ruled State, in a similar case last year. Whether the three arrested were indeed the creators of the app remains a question of investigation and the limited police version at the moment is that they were promoting the platform, at a minimum. The Commissioner of the Mumbai Police has said the probe is continuing and anyone involved in the crime, directly or indirectly, will be arrested and prosecuted. It is delicious irony that the Mumbai police reports to the Maharashtra government led by the Shiv Sena, long accused of xenophobic politics. The Mumbai police were also quick to act in an earlier case involving threats to cricketer Virat Kohli for standing up for his Muslim teammate.

It is indeed baffling that the Delhi police, that is expected to play a critical role in securing the lives of all important functionaries of the country, threw their hands up when faced with the challenge of identifying some random imposters on social media. Such a level of incompetence or connivance is ominous. The Delhi police say they have written to GitHub, the U.S.-based platform that hosted the toxic apps. They are also seeking the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty procedure to find information about the app from the U.S., after its Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations unit took over the case. All this is being revealed after a second FIR was filed this week. Sena MP Priyanka Chaturvedi had written to the Union IT Minister, in July and September, about several social media platforms or events that were being used to berate Muslim women. In November, the Minister replied that the Ministry was working on "identifying the gaps in current legislation to address contemporary issues of cyberspace including provisions to protect citizens, especially women, from any online harassment and cyber bullying". While that is necessary, it cannot be an excuse to let online mobs roam free. The police must identify and arrest the original culprit, but if that process takes months on end, there have to be interim measures to enforce the rule of law. The Mumbai Police have done exactly that, in acting with the alacrity that this case deserves.

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