

## **Facebook user made police report**

**Offended by the racist postings of three youths, he reported the incident**

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WHEN full-time national serviceman Prhabakaran joined a Facebook discussion on the things parents do to frighten their children into behaving, he expected to be amused.

Instead, he was offended to find remarks being made about Indians. He felt some of the comments were racist, and made a police report on Jan 31.

On Wednesday, police said three Chinese youths aged between 17 and 18 had been arrested for sedition and were out on bail while investigations continued.

They are believed to have been involved in the postings on the Facebook discussion site, which drew more than 2,000 members in two weeks.

An avid Facebook user, Mr Prhabakaran told The Straits Times that he found a Jan 29 post by someone calling himself Desmond Tan especially offensive for the things said about Indians. Mr Prhabakaran, who uses the moniker 'Prab Nathan' online, said: 'It started to hit me that what could have started as a joke had become mindless, point-blank racism.'

He and other members - including those with Chinese names - ticked off 'Desmond Tan' and others who had put up offensive posts, but to no avail.

The comments were removed from the group's homepage only after the three youths were arrested.

Explaining why he went to the police, Mr Prhabakaran said: 'At first, I thought I was the only one who found these comments distasteful and disrespectful, but I soon found that many of my friends, Indians and others alike, agreed with me.'

'I even received e-mail messages from Singaporeans living overseas condemning the group.'

Mr Prhabakaran felt the police action was right.

'Such remarks threaten our racial and religious harmony.'

In a statement on Wednesday, Police Deputy Assistant Commissioner Teo Chun Ching said that the authorities took a stern view of 'acts that could threaten the social harmony in Singapore'.

'The Internet may be a convenient medium to express one's views but members of the public should bear in mind that they are no less accountable for their actions online,' he said.

Under the Sedition Act, those convicted of promoting feelings of ill will and hostility between different races or classes face fines of up to \$5,000 and three years' jail.

Nanyang Technological University assistant professor Norman Vasu, who specialises in ethnic and religious relations, believes the episode was an anomaly.

'The majority of Singaporeans have no truck with such views. Based on data we have, race relations in Singapore are very good,' he said.

Mr Tan Tarn How, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, felt that 'not enough effort is spent on educating people and in nurturing values such as sensitivity to the other and in arriving at a wide and public articulate consensus about how to behave with sensitivity'.

He added that in certain cases, 'legal actions are sometimes necessary'.

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