

Police probe case of racial slur, assault on woman, 55

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SINGAPORE: The police are investigating a case of a man who allegedly kicked a woman in her chest and shouted a racial slur at her for not wearing a mask properly while brisk walking.

Madam Hindocha Nita Vishnubhai, 55, said she was exercising last Friday when the incident occurred.

The tutor, an Indian Singaporean, said she was brisk walking from Choa Chu Kang MRT station towards Choa Chu Kang Stadium at about 8.30am that day when the alleged assault took place.

In response to queries from The Straits Times, the police confirmed a report has been filed regarding the incident and they are investigating the case.

ST understands the man is being investigated for voluntarily causing hurt and harassment.

Giving her account, Madam Nita, a mother of two adult children, said she had lowered her mask below her nose to prevent breathlessness as she was walking fast. She was wearing a sleeveless top and track pants.

She turned around when she heard a man shout at her from behind. She said the man was in a light-coloured T-shirt with dark shorts and sports shoes, and was accompanied by a woman.

"He shouted at me to put my mask above my nose," she said. She told him she was exercising.

The man, believed to be in his late 20s, again shouted at her to put her mask up. Madam Nita said she tried once more to explain.

"He then started to abuse me and even used a racial slur. I was absolutely shocked... I wanted to avoid an argument with him, so I said 'God bless you' and decided to walk away," she added.

Madam Nita said the man then ran towards her and gave her a "flying kick".

"It was a very forceful kick which caused me to fall to the ground. I kept saying 'he kicked me, he kicked me'. I was in complete disbelief," said Madam Nita, who is about 1.6m tall and weighs 60kg.

She suffered scratches on her arms and hands from the fall. The couple ran away after she fell to the ground, she added.

A bystander who had witnessed the incident from a nearby bus stop rushed to her aid, helping her get up and offering plasters to stem the bleeding from the scratches.

After talking to her husband, Madam Nita filed a police report on Friday night. She intends to have her injuries checked by a doctor.

Under current regulations, people can remove their mask when engaging in strenuous exercise but must put it back on once done.

Sport Singapore defines "strenuous exercise" as running, jogging, cycling, static exercises and drills for warm-ups, brisk walking and walking on hilly terrain like Bukit Timah Nature Reserve.

Dr Mathew Mathews, principal research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and head of IPS Social Lab, a centre for social indicator research, said: "Xenophobia and racism, while not a staple in Singapore society, has been around for a while. The pandemic has the potential to exacerbate these existing fault lines.

"It takes constant public education and vigilance so that people remember that keeping social trust between communities is crucial and will be important even when we don't have to worry about the virus."

Professor Leong Chan-Hoong from the Singapore University of Social Sciences said: "We should not condone racism, xenophobia, and violence - these should be dealt with accordingly... in light of the current climate, the authorities cannot leave it to the community to enforce these rules but must police it strictly."