

November 14, 2023

Against the Targeting of IIT Bombay Professor

By: Faculty Forum IIT Bombay

IIT Bombay faculty statement against the recent attacks on and targeting of a colleague and social media posts with biased allegations.

The Faculty Forum of IIT Bombay is extremely distressed with the tarnishing of the reputation and physical threats to one of our colleagues, Prof. Sharmistha Saha, via anonymous phone-calls, and posts on social media platforms. The allegations made in social media about her supporting Hamas or terrorists are based on misinformation and falsehood.

The Faculty Forum of IIT Bombay firmly expresses its support to our colleague Prof. Sharmistha Saha of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of IIT Bombay.

Some facts about the incident based on our detailed discussion with her:

? A documentary film titled “*Arna’s Children*” was screened by her as a part of an ongoing post-graduate course, due to its relevance in the art of healing children who have gone through trauma. This film and the scheduled discussion thereafter had been relevant to the course.

? *Arna’s Children* is a 2004 documentary film about The Freedom Theatre founded by two Jewish theater personalities (Arna Khamis and Israeli actor/film-maker Juliano Mer Khamis). The film has won several awards at international levels and is also freely available on YouTube.

? Mr. Sudhanva Deshpande was invited as a guest speaker for introducing the relevance of the film to the audience, and for the post-screening discussion. He is a theatre personality, and is currently associated with Jana Natya Manch, which has collaborated in the past with The Freedom Theatre.

? During a regular class of the course, a student, who was not part of the course, started recording the lecture session on his mobile device. The course instructor told him not to record the lecture, and to leave the class, but he refused to cooperate and instead spoke to her aggressively.

? During the entire session, our colleague neither expressed any opinion about terrorism nor did she express any opinion about Hamas. She was not able to respond either to the film or to the comments made by Mr. Deshpande because of the intimidating atmosphere prevailing in the class.

? The recording (which was made despite her explicit instruction not to do so) was put-up on social media posts and was also shown on some TV channels. Further, a gathering of people outside IIT Bombay Main gate was organized on 11 November, 2023, in which people shouted slogans and carried large hoardings containing the name and photographs of our colleague. They shouted slogans mentioning our colleague as a traitor, issuing death-threats to her, and calling for her termination from service at IIT Bombay.

The Faculty Forum of IIT Bombay **strongly condemns:**

? Calls to violence against our colleague,

? Use of her photograph and name in the hoardings,

? Tarnishing her reputation in print, TV and social media through biased information and false claims that she supports Hamas and terrorism.

Prof. Rajkumar S. Pant,
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The Faculty Forum of IIT Bombay is a formal body of the institute, through which faculty members at IIT Bombay can voice opinions to the institute and other bodies.