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# Pakistan: 8 March women demonstrators face backlash and threats of violence

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**Aurat [Women] March started last year in Karachi and spread to the whole country this year. It has emerged as a new wave of feminism in Pakistan — and with that, the march organizers have been receiving rape and death threats online.**

Islamabad: Aurat March 2019 was held on March 8 as part of International Women's Day celebrations in different cities including Lahore, Faisalabad, Islamabad, Peshawar, Karachi, Hyderabad and Larkana. People from diverse backgrounds came out on the roads in large numbers to express solidarity with women. What happened next was a never-ending backlash and social media abuse for all the women involved or speaking for the march.

Nighat Dad, founder of the Digital Rights Foundation is one of the organizers in Lahore. She received rape threats on Twitter in reply to one of her posts on the Aurat March. Five other women reached out to her nonprofit organization, which works for digital rights in Pakistan and runs a cyber-harassment helpline, to complain of receiving rape and death threats.

A number of women connected with the march are facing violent hate speech, rape threats, acid crimes and worse. Women are being targeted for staging a demonstration for their own rights and publicly aligning with the cause of women's rights and offering vocal support to Aurat March.

Digital Rights Monitor has reported various social media posts and users involved in incitement of violence against the demonstrators.

"The hate against Aurat March is demonstrative of the fact that the turnout and the zeal behind the march has touched a sore spot among of patriarchy. This is the main reason why, even days after the march, we are continuing to see hateful commentary, endless judgement and increasing threats of violence", says Sadaf Khan, co-founder Media Matters for Democracy, "The march has touched such a raw nerve, that people are actually investing in spreading misinformation to discredit the movement".

Doctored images from the march, often containing sexual innuendos and falsified slogans are being circulated online. While some users are trying to raise awareness about these morphed images, the negative public sentiment is still keeping these falsified images in circulation.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly on Wednesday unanimously passed a resolution condemning the Aurat March, which was held across Pakistani cities on March 8.

The resolution, presented by Rehana Ismail of the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), claimed that women had taken part in the march holding placards and raising slogans that were "obscene".

"Some hidden forces have sped up their efforts to destroy our family system and social customs, the

practical demonstration of which took place on March 8, 2019, in various big cities on Women's Day," the resolution stated.

It said the demands made at the event for women empowerment were "shameful and un-Islamic".

Some of the slogans raised in the march were: "*Khana garam kardoongi, bistar khud garam lo.*" (I'll warm up the food, you warm up the bed yourself.) "*Tu kare to stud, mein karoon to slut*" (If you do it, you are a stud, if I do it, I am a slut) and "*Mera Jism, Meri Marzi,*" (My body, my rules.)

Pakistan has experienced a surge in social media usage with more than 40 million Facebook users. The rapid growth has sparked an online debate about misogyny, with some women highlighting daily hate and pornographic messaging.

Many of these politico-religious parties, in past years, have rejected Pakistan's Domestic Violence Bill calling it "anti-Islam". In a contradiction of sorts, many of these parties, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, also have vibrant women's wings that are actively involved in their politics and activism.

A report by the Human Rights Watch last year estimated that 1,000 "honour killings" — the practice of relatives murdering girls or women because they think the victim has brought shame or dishonour on the family — take place in Pakistan each year.

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