

'All members of group liable for prosecution'

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THE THANE rural police, probing members of a WhatsApp group for allegedly sharing child pornography videos on the group, said the group, BB Bad Boys, was active since January 2 and at the time when a case was registered against two 'admins' last week, it had 217 members, several living outside India.

The police registered a case following it up with arrests after a man, who was part of the group, uncomfortable with the videos, approached Santacruz-based cyber crime and cyber security expert Ritesh Bhatia. "I did a detailed investigation at the request of the police and advised him to approach the police station closest to where he lives to file a complaint," said Bhatia.

"This is not your average WhatsApp group where people wish each other 'Good Morning' or 'Good Night', send festival greetings or say 'Happy Independence Day'. The group is purely for porn," added Bhatia.

He said some 20 clips showing sexual assaults on children were posted on the group since February. Eight videos show Indian children while the rest appear to have been shot outside India, he added.

"Twenty-five members were very active in the group, posting videos and commenting on them. In February, one of them posed a question, 'Does anyone have any CP?' They would use this abbreviation for child pornography," he added.

The police have so far arrested six persons, five from Bhayander and one from Nashik. A hunt is under way to locate one of the group's admins, who is believed to live in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu.

"We are gathering information on other members of the group and reaching out to respective state polices to catch them," said Atul Kulkarni, Deputy SP, Bhayander division.

Kulkarni has reason to believe that at least a few of them who posted the clips might be hackers as the clips are not easy to get hold of. "There are only two ways you get these clips — either you access the dark net where child pornography is rampant and download them or someone forwards them to you and you forward them to others," Bhatia said.

Cyber psychologist Nirali Bhatia said people viewing child pornography can be clubbed into four categories of offenders. "There are paedophiles, some who are looking for sexual experiences outside the normal, some who stumble on to child pornography by accident and then either decide to explore it or leave and the fourth category that does this for money. They look at it purely as a business model," she says.

In the latest incident, she said each member would be liable for criminal prosecution. "The law (Information Technology Act) is very clear that those who are even found in possession of child pornography can be booked. This makes it all the more extraordinary that one of the members of the group had the courage to approach the police knowing that he was taking a huge risk," she said.

