

A Mobile App in Delhi Aims to Protect Women

Reuters

Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer in front of an image of actor Matt Damon at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas



This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

More than twenty thousand new products appeared at this year's

Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada. Among the attention getters last week were "ultrabooks," or very thin laptop computers. Also, Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer announced new smartphones with the Windows Phone operating system.

Far from the bright lights of Vegas are the poorly lit streets of Delhi. A new mobile app called Fight Back aims to make those streets safer for women like Cheena Sikka. She often works late. A company taxi takes her part of the way home, but then she has to walk five to ten minutes alone.

CHEENA SIKKA: "It's dark and the kind of people who are around are not really to be comfortable with or safe. You cannot feel safe."

Ms. Sikka uses Fight Back to follow her location with GPS, or global positioning system, software. Jagdish Mitra is the head of CanvasM Technologies, which recently launched the app.

JAGDISH MITRA: "The moment you feel uncomfortable, you really don't need to do anything else but press one button."

The woman pushes the button on her touchscreen but has a few seconds to cancel her decision. If not, a message with her location will go by text, e-mail or Facebook to anyone she has put on a list.

MALE EMPLOYEE: "Divya has raised a panic alert. She might be in trouble."

The location also appears on a map in the company's offices. But Mr. Mitra says his company does not serve as a public monitoring center.

JAGDISH MITRA: "We are not in the provision of, you know, managing the law, if you may. The law has to be managed by the people who actually are authorized to do it, which is the police and so on and so forth."

Officials reported more than four hundred rapes in Delhi in twenty-ten. Many media organizations have called the city of seventeen million people "India's rape capital."

Kalpana Viswanath is a researcher with the women's group Jagori. She works to make cities safer for women through changes like better lighting and wider sidewalks. She supports Fight Back but has some concerns.

KALPANA VISWANATH: "While the app to me is very important and has a good role to play, I think what we have to be careful about is that it doesn't again fall back on women to solve their problem."

Hindol Sengupta is a founder of Whypoll, a nonprofit group that works on the Fight Back project. He says Indian police often do not take women's safety seriously. He says, "Most women don't go to the police because in most parts of the country, the police are seen as more part of the problem than part of the solution."

HINDOL SENGUPTA: "So we're saying here's a tool -- you can go to the police if you want, and so you should, and so you must. But, in case you choose not to, and in case you can't reach them, you can directly reach out to your friends and family. And together, you can propel the system. You can propel the security apparatus, so to speak, to act."

The makers of Fight Back say police in Delhi and other Indian cities have expressed interest in linking to the system.

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report. You can find a video about Fight Back at voaspecialenglish.com. I'm June Simms.

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