

Bataris banned lending apps

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On August 12, a family in the central Indian city of Bhopal took a selfie in their home. After the photo, the father, Bhupendra Vishwakarma, gave his two sons, eight and three years old, a poisoned drink, and he and his wife took their lives by hanging themselves.

In his four-page suicide note, Vishwakarma, 35, who worked in an insurance firm, wrote that he was trapped in a cycle of debt from loan apps. Recovery agents had been tormenting him for months and the last message he received from them tipped him over the edge.

It said, "Tell him to repay the loan; otherwise, today I will strip him naked and upload it on social media."

In his suicide note, Vishwakarma said, "Today, the situation has reached the point of losing my job as well. I can't see a future for myself and my family. I am no longer worthy of showing my face to anyone. How will I face my family?"

Police have arrested five people involved in the scam so far even as the investigation continues.

Vishwakarma's story is not unique. Shivani Rawat, a 23-year-old college receptionist in Delhi, faced her own ordeal. In June 2023, she applied for a 4,000 rupee (\$48) loan through an app called "Kreditbe", since her salary was delayed. Her loan request remained pending, with no funds received. Yet, within a week, she began receiving 10-15 calls demanding 9,000 rupees (\$108) for repayment.

Rawat said she told the recovery agents that she hadn't received any money in her account, "but they started using abusive language. When I stopped answering their calls, they began sending me abusive texts."

In August, her colleagues received manipulated explicit photos of her and her family that had been sent by representatives of Kreditbe. She tried to explain the situation to her coworkers, but the next day, her manager asked her to resign because her presence made others uncomfortable.

"After losing my job, I became so depressed that I even had thoughts of ending my life," Rawat admitted.

Al Jazeera tried reaching out to Kreditbe for a comment but there was no information available on the firm and none of the representatives who had been in touch with Rawat were available any more.

Kreditbe's name is a rip-off of a legitimate loan app called KreditBee, a common modus operandi for these illegal loan apps which often choose names similar to reputable brands to create a sense of authenticity.

Both Vishwakarma and Rawat had borrowed money from lending apps, which offer loans to users in a



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convenient, few clicks and without the extensive documentation that a traditional bank loan requires. The money is credited to the borrower's account within a few minutes, unlike the five to seven days that a bank loan takes for borrowers who meet the high eligibility bar.

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