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## Rose McGowan sues Weinstein for 'diabolical' effort to silence her

US actress Rose McGowan filed a lawsuit on Wednesday against Harvey Weinstein, his ex-attorneys and a private intelligence agency, alleging they conspired to discredit her when she accused the disgraced movie mogul of rape. "This case is about a diabolical and illegal effort by one of America's most powerful men and his representatives to silence sexual assault victims," the suit filed in Los Angeles federal court states. "And it is about the courageous women and journalists who persisted to reveal the truth."

McGowan was one of the first women to make public allegations about Weinstein's abuse, triggering his downfall in 2017 and the emergence of the

#MeToo movement that brought down many other public figures. Her lawsuit targets Weinstein, lawyers David Boies and Lisa Bloom and the private intelligence firm Black Cube. The claims include racketeering, invasion of privacy and fraud.

McGowan alleges that when Weinstein learned in 2016 that she planned to write about the alleged rape said to have taken place in 1997, he unleashed a team of fixers to ensure her story "never saw the light of day, and-if it did-that no one would believe her." "Weinstein's campaign against McGowan and others involved some of the most powerful forces that money could buy," according to the suit. "He enlisted prominent, media-savvy representatives David Boies

and Lisa Bloom. He hired the international spy agency, Black Cube."

The suit says Weinstein and his team worked in concert for more than a year to try to silence his victims and journalists reporting on the abuses. Bloom's attorney Eric George said in a statement to AFP on Wednesday that "it is inexcusable that Ms. McGowan chose to include my client in her lawsuit." "Facts matter," he added. "There is simply no credible factual or legal basis for her claims against my client. We look forward to our day in court to set the record straight."—AFP



Rose McGowan



Afghan students attend a class at the Code to Inspire school in Herat. — AFP photos



## Afghan girl coders build their own champions

Like the princess who hops over goblins and throws daggers at evil wizards in the video game they built, a team of women coders in patriarchal Afghanistan wants to inspire a generation of girls to smash obstacles. The young women are part of an after-school training program called Code to Inspire in the western city of Herat, where they learn tech skills and create games and apps to educate girls across Afghanistan and beyond.

Their highest-profile success has been this year's release of "Afghan Hero Girl", built over six months by 12 young women, a phone app in which a princess wearing a green veil leaps around a crumbling castle in a quest to defeat a wizard and rescue her family. Fereshteh Forough, a computer science teacher and a former refugee who founded Code to Inspire in 2015, said students were sick of the lack of female representation in the gaming industry and told her they were bored of "playing games where men are superheroes".

The game represents "the challenges and obstacles that women are facing every day in Afghanistan and despite all the backlashes they keep fighting and going through it," Forough, who is now based in New York, said in an email exchange with AFP. In a country where girls often have only limited educational opportunities, internet access is patchy and women face deeply ingrained discrimination at every turn, Forough sees tech skills as having a transformative potential.

Like many Afghans, she worries about an eventual return to power of the Taliban, who during their brutally repressive rule in the 1990s banned women from working or going outside the house. "By learning how to code you can do online remote work from the safety of your house if you (can) access the internet," she said. "The work that we do ... is about equality, empowerment and change so that these young ladies are able to add value to their communities and fight for their social, political and economic equality," she added.

### 'Get educated faster'

Women's rights and education for girls have made significant gains since the fall of the Taliban nearly two decades ago, but challenges remain as the insurgents frequently attack girls' schools and threaten female students. Afghanistan's ongoing war, now in its 19th year, resulted in more than 1,000 schools being closed by the end of 2018, UNICEF said, depriving some 500,000 children of their right to learning. A disproportionate number of these—about 60 percent—are girls.

"In the worst case scenario if the Taliban limit women's presence to the work space, (tech is) a skill that can get them beyond their doorsteps," Forough said. The games and apps are both educational and entertaining. Some include memories of the coders or are based on true stories. For instance, in the "Fight Against Opium" game, soldiers are deployed on a mission to poppy-growing Helmand province. It was based on a true story of one of the coders' brothers who was deployed to the southern province.

"My main goal as a game and app developer is to make as many educational games for girls as possible," Code to Inspire student Nasrin Wahidy said in a recent visit by AFP to the Herat school where the program is based. "We want the girls to learn and get educated faster through games." Another game teaches young Afghans how to recognize the geography of their country by showing them where each province is located. So far, Code to Inspire has taught more than 150 students to code, make games and apps, and develop websites. "They will become a digital citizen of the world without considering geographical boundaries," Forough said. — AFP

## Film-maker stirs Pakistan #MeToo debate with rape allegation

Acclaimed Pakistani film-maker Jamshed Mahmood Raza has added new momentum to the country's fledgling #MeToo movement after airing allegations that he was raped by an unnamed media tycoon.

The director, who is popularly known as Jami, rocked Pakistani social media over the weekend after he published several tweets describing the alleged assault that happened 13 years ago.

"Why im so strongly supporting #metoo? cuz i know exactly how it happens now, inside a room then outside courts inside courts and how a survivor hides confides cuz i was brutally raped by a very powerful person in our media world," he wrote Sunday evening. The tweets were in response to a backlash online after a professor in the eastern city of Lahore committed suicide after allegedly being falsely accused of sexual harassment.

Amid the backlash, Jami pleaded with social media users to trust victims of sexual assault and avoid ignoring their accusations. "I told my few close friends but no one took it seriously," added Jami, whose 2015 film "Moor" ("Mother") was a massive hit. The film-maker has so far refused to name the tycoon allegedly behind the assault, while the allegations have unleashed a torrent of differing reactions online.

"@jamiyaad I see you. I hear you. I stand with you. Always," tweeted popular actress Meesha Shafi — who helped kickstart Pakistan's #MeToo movement in 2018 after accusing a popular singer in the country of harassment — on Thursday. "Jami is a true ally. This is unprecedented in Pakistan. This kind of revelation from a man," wrote Twitter user Khizra. Others were more sceptical.

"Still, u cant b serious using it to square Lhr professor's suicide & misuse of #MeToo," said another Twitter user Razi. "Pakistan is suffering by both #metoo & misuse of #MeToo." "No #MeToo here. Should have said No, but succumbed," wrote Ali Raj in response to a blog about the story. The #MeToo and #Timesup campaigns have gone global since allegations of sexual misconduct by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein in 2017, sparking an avalanche of accusations against other powerful men.—AFP



Jamshed Mahmood Raza