

Four arrested in Spain over hate campaign against Real Madrid's Vinicius Jr

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Vinicius Junior of Real Madrid celebrates scoring his team's fifth goal during the UEFA Champions League 2024/25 League Phase MD3 match between Real Madrid C.F. and Borussia Dortmund at Estadio Santiago Bernabeu on October 22, 2024 in Madrid, Spain. (Photo by Denis Doyle/Getty Images)

Madrid, October 24 (RHC)-- Four people have been arrested and questioned in Spain on suspicion of conducting an online hate campaign encouraging Atletico Madrid fans to racially abuse Real Madrid star forward Vinicius Jr, police said.

The men were detained on October 14 and 15 and then released as investigations continued into social media slogans that urged fans to wear face masks so they could insult the Black Brazil international without being identified, police added on Thursday.

They were the first detentions announced by police linked to the campaign, which set out to target the 24-year-old in the build-up to the Spanish capital's derby on September 29 at Atletico Madrid's Metropolitano stadium. It used the hashtag #MetropolitanoConMascarilla (Metropolitano with a Mask).

Vinicius Jr, who has faced abuse at several matches, last year called LaLiga – the nation's premier football league – and Spain “racist” after hearing slurs from the stands during a match at Valencia's Mestalla stadium.

In a landmark case, three Valencia football fans were each sentenced to eight months in prison in June for hate crimes against Vinicius Jr – the first conviction for racist insults in a football stadium in Spain.

On Thursday, Spain's National Police did not name the four men and there was no immediate statement from any lawyers representing them. Under Spanish legal procedures, a judge will investigate and eventually consider whether there is enough evidence to proceed to trial.

Police said the online campaign went viral, raising “significant social alarm”. The investigation remains open and could lead to more arrests, police added. LaLiga stepped in the day before the September 29 Madrid derby, saying it was calling for the arrest of anyone involved in the campaign, which it said amounted to the crime of incitement to hatred.

Atletico Madrid did not immediately reply to a request for comment, but they said earlier this month that they were committed to adopting internal disciplinary measures against their associates involved in racist, xenophobic or intolerant incidents.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA]

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