

## **India: Unnao rape victim dies in hospital after being set ablaze**

Monday 9 December 2019, by [BHARDWAJ Mayank](#), [PHARTIYAL Sankalp](#), [SIDDIQUI Zeba](#) (Date first published: 7 December 2019).

**UNNAO, India (Reuters) - A 23-year-old rape victim set on fire by a gang of men, which included her alleged rapists, has died in a New Delhi hospital, prompting protests from opposition leaders who blamed the ruling party for failing to check incidents of violence against women.**

The woman was on her way to board a train in Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh to attend a court hearing over her rape when she was doused with kerosene and set on fire on Thursday, according to police.

She was airlifted to New Delhi for treatment later that day.

The attack, the second major case of violence against women in the past two weeks, has sparked public outrage in India.

The woman died on Friday after suffering a cardiac arrest, Dr. Shalabh Kumar, the head of burns and plastic department at New Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital told Reuters.

"She was having 95% burns," he said, adding the woman's wind pipe was burnt and "toxic and hot fumes" had filled her lungs.

The woman had filed a complaint with Unnao police in March alleging she had been raped at gunpoint on December 12, 2018, police documents showed. The woman named two local men, one of them was arrested by police, the other absconded.

Having been subsequently jailed, the alleged rapist was released last week after securing bail, police officer S.K. Bhagat said in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh.

On Thursday, the rape victim was seized by five men, including the two people she had named in her complaint, and beaten, stabbed and set on fire, local media reported citing her statement to police.

Still ablaze, she walked nearly a kilometre, seeking help before finally calling the police herself, according to Aaj Tak TV news channel.

All five of the accused have been arrested and are in 14-day judicial custody, Vikrant Vir, superintendent of police, Unnao, told Reuters.

A fast-track court would hear the case and the guilty would not be spared, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said.

In India, lengthy trials, often a result of fewer courts and judges, tend to delay convictions, leaving poor, disillusioned victims with little money and patience to pursue the case.

Also, long trials result in bails to the accused who often intimidate victims and their witnesses, and try tampering with evidence.

The victim's father has alleged that his family was being harassed and threatened by the family of the accused.

"We tried to seek protection as the accused and their family kept threatening my daughter and my family, but we received little help from the government," he said. "Now, every single accused should be either hanged or shot dead."

## **CRIME IN UTTAR PRADESH**

Uttar Pradesh is India's most populous state and has become notorious for its poor record regarding crimes against women, with more than 4,200 cases of rape reported there in 2017 - the highest in the country.

*[Slideshow (15 Images)]*

Opposition leaders, including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, general secretary of India's main opposition Congress party, accused the Uttar Pradesh government, run by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, of failing to curb crimes against women.

In an earlier incident in Unnao, a young woman had accused Uttar Pradesh lawmaker Kuldeep Singh Sengar of raping her in 2017. In July last year, the victim and her lawyer were critically injured in a highway collision, when a truck hit the car in which they were travelling. The woman's two aunts, who were also in the car, were killed in the accident.

Sengar denies the rape and any involvement in the car crash.

On Friday, Indian police shot dead four men who were suspected of raping and killing a 27-year-old veterinarian near Hyderabad city, drawing applause from across the country angry over violence against women.

But many were also concerned that police had over reached in shooting the alleged suspects without any trial.

"What will it take (to end rapes)? Not the encounter of just the poor men who rape but swift arrest and certain punishment of all rapists, however powerful or closely related to the victim," said Karuna Nundy, a lawyer practising at India's Supreme Court who was instrumental in shaping anti-rape laws in 2013.

"And that takes real change, it's not as easy as passing a legal amendment to increase sentencing."

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**P.S.**

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