

# 2024 Kolkata rape and murder incident

On 9 August 2024, Moumita Debnath, a second-year postgraduate trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College in Kolkata, West Bengal, India was found dead<sup>[3]</sup> in a seminar hall on the college campus. An autopsy later confirmed that she had been raped and murdered. The incident has elevated debate about the safety of women and doctors in India, and has sparked significant outrage, nationwide protests, and demands for a thorough investigation.

## Incident

On 9 August 2024, Debnath was reported missing by colleagues. At about 11:30 am,<sup>[7]</sup> the trainee doctor's body was discovered in one of college's seminar rooms in a semi-nude state with her eyes, mouth and genitals bleeding. She was later declared dead.

## Investigation

### autopsy

An autopsy revealed that Debnath had been raped and sexually assaulted before being killed via strangulation. The report, spanning four pages, also noted a deep wound in her genital tract, lips, left leg, right hand, ring finger, neck, and face. The report revealed that the scratch marks on the woman's face were likely caused by the accused's fingernails. According to the report, pressure was applied to her mouth and throat, and she was strangled, resulting in a fracture of the thyroid cartilage. The report also noted bleeding from her eyes, mouth, and private parts, with the injuries in her genital area attributed to "perverted sexuality" and "genital torture." The exact cause of the injuries to her eyes remains undetermined.<sup>[8]</sup><sup>[9]</sup>

The postmortem report also revealed that around 150 mg of semen was found in the vaginal swab.<sup>[10]</sup><sup>[11]</sup> This finding, along with the extent of injuries, led the doctors who performed the autopsy and the victim's parents to suggest Debnath may have been subjected to gang rape.<sup>[9]</sup><sup>[10]</sup> Kolkata Police rejected such claims as rumors, saying that it is impossible to distinguish semen from multiple individuals with the naked eye during an autopsy.

### Arrest

Following an investigation, the police arrested a suspect on 9 August after finding his Bluetooth headset at the crime scene. The suspect is a civic volunteer with the Kolkata Police disaster management force and a member of the police welfare association. He is a trained boxer with connections to a few high-ranking officials in the Kolkata Police. He had been posted at the police outpost near the medical college and would act as a middleman for few patients who were close to him. He had been married four times and has been described as a womaniser and domestic abuser. According to the Kolkata Police, he confessed to the crime. The mother of the accused has defended her son and says he is being framed.

### Transfer of the case to CBI

On 13 August 2024, the Calcutta High Court asked the state police to hand over the case to Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) while expressing discontent with the investigation so far.[15] They also flagged the possibility of destruction of evidence if the state police continued with their investigation.

## Reactions

### Resignation of the college principal

Dr. Sandip Ghosh, an orthopedic surgeon and the principal of college, resigned amid the protests surrounding the incident. He cited an inability to endure the ongoing humiliation from social media criticism and defamatory remarks by politicians. Shortly after his resignation, he was appointed as the principal of Calcutta National Medical College, a move that sparked further outrage.[17] On 13 August, the Calcutta High Court directed the government and the concerning authorities to place him on extended leave while also criticising his immediate re-appointment at the Calcutta National Medical College.

### Protests

The incident garnered widespread media coverage and triggering outrage across the nation especially within the medical community, as student unions and colleagues of the deceased demanded justice and improved security measures on campus.

In response, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) called on Union Health Minister J. P. Nadda to introduce a special central law aimed at preventing violence against doctors. They also urged that hospitals be designated as safe zones. This appeal followed widespread protests and strikes by resident doctors across the country in response to the crime, which raised serious concerns about the safety of medical staff.

On 13 August, protests escalated as more than 8,000 government doctors in Maharashtra, including Mumbai, the financial capital of India, halted work in all hospital departments except for emergency services, according to media reports. In New Delhi, junior doctors wearing white coats staged a protest outside major government hospitals. Emergency services stayed suspended on 13 August in almost all the government-run medical college hospitals in Kolkata. Similar protests in cities such as Lucknow, and Goa hit some hospital services. Protests by junior doctors were being held at all the major medical institutions in Delhi and Kolkata including AIIMS Delhi, Lady Hardinge Medical College, Safdarjung Hospital, RML Hospital, Calcutta National Medical College and Hospital as well as the R. G. Kar Medical College and Hospital.

The Federation of Resident Doctors Association (FORDA) on 12 August, announced an indefinite nationwide suspension of elective services as a form of protest. The protests were called off on 13 August after a delegation of the IMA and other groups had met the Health Minister J. P. Nadda. Several resident doctors associations in India, including the Federation of All India Medical Associations (FAIMA), AIIMS Delhi, Calcutta National Medical College, Indira Gandhi Medical College Dwarka, R. G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, RML Hospital, and Safdarjung Hospital have continued protests.[21][22] Two days after calling off the strike, FORDA resumed its strike following reports of police violence against protesters at R.G. Kar Medical College.[23]

Large protests and candlelight marches were held starting at midnight of 14 August. The protests, called "Women, Reclaim the Night", were held in Delhi and Kolkata.[24]

“Reclaim the night” protests during the night of 14 August On 15 August, shortly after midnight, police used tear gas and a baton charge against a crowd at R.G. Kar Medical College after a group of unidentified individuals toppled the barricade and entered the hospital. The individuals threw stones at the hospital premises and vandalised the emergency ward and the area where the victim was found.[25] Several policemen and protesting civilians were injured. Kolkata Police commissioner Vineet Goyal blamed the incident on the “malicious media campaign” against the Kolkata police.[25][26] Kolkata police detained and later arrested 19 persons responsible for the violence and vandalism at the hospital premises on 15 August.

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