Beat: Miscellaneous

Tourists cancel trips to India in wake of sex attacks

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USPA News - Brutal sexual assaults in India that made international headlines in recent months have contributed to a sharp drop in the number of foreign tourists over the last three months, according to a new study that said scores of women have canceled their bookings. Sexual abuse in India has received international attention since a group of men brutally gang-raped a 23-year-old student inside a moving bus in New Delhi in December, prompting nationwide protests to demand justice and better protection for women.

The victim later suffered severe organ failure as a result of serious injuries to her body and brain, resulting in her death at a Singapore hospital on December 29. While most cases receive little to no attention, there have been several prominent incidents since. A 39-year-old Swiss woman was gang-raped in March while on a cycling tour with her companion near a forest in the state of Madhya Pradesh, and a young British woman was seriously injured several weeks ago when she jumped out of a hotel window to escape a sex attack in Agra. India`s Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM) said Monday that the brutal attacks on foreigners has resulted in a 25 percent drop in foreign tourists in the last three months, according to a survey conducted among 1,200 tour operators across India. The number of female tourists has dropped by 35 percent, according to the survey. "During last winter season, Goa, Jaipur, Agra, and Kerala happened to be highly congested tourist spots but, due to recent incidents in India, there has been a substantial fall in the tourist traffic," said ASSOCHAM Secretary General D S Rawat, adding that the reflection of the Delhi gang rape is now visible across the country. The survey found that tourism has mostly suffered in New Delhi, followed by cities such as Agra and Jaipur. "While India attempts to enhance its image in the eyes of foreign tourists, [the sex attacks] has raised concerns about the safety of female travelers to the country," Rawat said, noting that the incidents have received international attention. ASSOCHAM said nearly 72 percent of tour operators reported cancellations of previously planned trips, especially by female tourists. The tour operators reported that most of the tourists who had canceled their trips were from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia. "Some tourists have e-mailed in asking whether it would be safe to travel and some have changed their mind about traveling to India this year," one tour operator said, while some tourists have opted to travel to other Asian countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam instead. "Those who are determined to visit India are taking extra precautions and avoiding affected areas." Rawat said the sex attacks may impact tourism in the long term and could affect the government`s plan to increase the number of foreign tourists by 12 percent a year. According to India`s Tourism Ministry, about 6.6 million foreigners traveled to India last year, earning the country some $17.7 billion in foreign exchange.

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