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Breaking News
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American tourist gang-raped in northern India: police

 **REUTERS** By Abhishek Madhukar | Reuters – 7 hrs ago

By Abhishek Madhukar

SHIMLA, India (Reuters) - An American tourist was gang-raped by a group of men in a hill resort in northern India, police said on Tuesday, in the latest of a series of attacks that have thrown the spotlight on women's safety in the world's largest democracy.

The woman was picked up by three men in a truck on Monday night while hitch-hiking back to her guest house in the town of Manali in Himachal Pradesh state, police said. She had been visiting friends and had been unable to find a taxi home.

Three men were briefly detained and then released in connection with the attack, Himachal Pradesh police chief B. Kamal Kumar told Reuters, clarifying an earlier statement which appeared to say the men had been arrested.

"Sorry, I think it was misquoted. I think they were detained for questioning, they were not arrested," Kumar told Reuters.

The woman told police her attackers took her to an isolated area and raped her. She was taken to a local hospital for preliminary tests before being taken back to her guest house, said a local police inspector, who declined to be identified.

"We are in contact with authorities but due to issues of privacy we have no further comment," Peter Vrooman, spokesman for the U.S. embassy in New Delhi, said in an email.

Instead of dropping the woman at her hotel, the men drove in a different direction for about 16 or 17 km (10.5 miles), then overpowered and raped her, the inspector said, adding that the hospital test had confirmed the sexual assault.

"Her condition is stable and she is accompanied by two women constables. All medical help has been given, and the doctors have been taking care of her," the inspector said. "We have told her we are like family and are available for any help."

In March, a Swiss tourist was gang-raped while on a camping trip in a forest in the central state of Madhya Pradesh. In the same month, a British woman jumped out of her hotel balcony in Uttar Pradesh state to escape a feared sexual assault.

Sex crimes are common in India. The National Crime Records Bureau says more than 24,200 rapes were reported across the country in 2011 -- about one every 20 minutes.

"Women should observe stringent security precautions, including avoiding use of public transport after dark without the company of known and trustworthy companions," according to a U.S. State Department travel advisory for India.

Police are investigating the alleged rape of a 21-year-old Irish woman working as a volunteer with a non-governmental organization in West Bengal at the weekend.

The gang rape of a 23-year-old Indian woman on a bus on December 16 in New Delhi brought thousands of people onto the streets in protest, demanding better policing to prevent sex crimes. The trainee physiotherapist later died from her injuries.

(Additional reporting by Annie Banerji and Reuters Television; editing by Matthias Williams and Mark Trevelyan)

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