

Delhi University's foreign students: on guard yet carefree

Meneka Bogollagama, a 20-year-old Sri Lankan studying in Delhi University (DU), believes the gruesome death of an Indian American student in the campus earlier this week has created a stir, but it doesn't make her feel unsafe.

'I feel quite safe in the campus,' Meneka, who is in the second year in the Sri Ram College of Commerce, told IANS.

The Delhi University campus is abuzz with talk of Keanan Mehra, a 22-year-old Indian American student who was found dead in his one-room rented apartment in the campus's Hudson Lines area Monday. Although police have registered a case of murder, it could also be a case of suicide.

But foreign students say they are not too worried.

'One of the reasons could be because I stay in the international girls hostel which ensures a safe environment. We have a bus that drops us to college every day and then picks us up later, so there is no question of using public conveyance either,' Meneka said.

'Whenever my friends and I go out, I don't feel wary of my surroundings. In fact, in many ways India reminds me of home,' she said.

According to Amrita Bahari, president of the Delhi University Students Union (DUSU), DU is home to around 2,000 foreign students.

'There are around 2,000 foreign students in the university both at the undergraduate and the postgraduate level. Each year we receive around 1,000 applications for admission to the various courses here from foreign students,' Bahari told IANS.

Most of the applicants are from countries like China, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Germany, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Canada, Africa and the US.

While the university's international boys and international girls hostels house most of these students, there are others who stay as paying guests or rent flats in and around the campus.

Pema Lyndoh, a student of Nepal studying Buddhism in Delhi University and living in a rented accommodation near the university's Kingsway Camp area, said so far she hadn't faced any major problem in the campus.

'Of course, there are random cases of eve teasing or purse snatching, but that is not just restricted to us but to everyone in general,' Lyndoh said.

Achon Gurung, Lyndoh's roommate and a student doing her masters in DU, said she feels very comfortable here.

'I have been living here for the past five years and till now, with the exception of a few squabbles here and there, there hasn't been a real crisis. As long as we pay our rent on time, the landlord doesn't bother us.

'Since these areas are student-dominated, even shopkeepers are quite amiable,' Gurung added.

Mary Farrakhan, a South African student studying literature, however, said that she had had to face quite a few unnerving incidents.

'People have this habit of simply staring at you...which I have got used to. But there was this incident I can't forget till date. I was walking to my flat alone one day when two guys on a motorbike started following me.

'Fortunately, I reached a restaurant and I quickly went in. After that I dialled my friend's number and he came to my rescue. Those guys, however, could not be traced. Since then I make sure that I don't venture out alone,' Farrakhan said.

Meneka also said that she does prefer hanging out with her other Sri Lankan friends or her friends from northeastern India.

'Most of us get very well with the northeast Indian students, more than with others. I have quite a few Manipuri and Assamese friends and with them I have watched quite a few Hindi movies as well!

'It's a different matter that I hardly understand a word of it but I enjoy it nevertheless.'

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