

Two forensic labs from outside state called upon to collect fresh evidence

Big Backlog In Maharashtra's Facilities

V Narayan, S Ahmed Ali & Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

Two forensic laboratories from outside Maharashtra have been enlisted to help collect fresh evidence in the Shakti Mills gangrape case even as the Kalina-based Forensic Science Laboratory works on analysing the evidence gathered so far.

The Mumbai police have roped in the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL), Hyderabad, and Gujarat Forensic Science Laboratory to build a watertight case against the five suspects accused of raping a 22-year-old photojournalist last week. Another major reason for their enlistment, police officers say, is the pendency of 70,000 samples in Maharashtra's forensic labs.

A team from Hyderabad CFSL—consisting Dr Asha Rikvastava, S K Choudhary and B K Mahapatra—landed in the city on Monday evening and visited the crime scene to run a battery of tests. Its report will be attached with the chargesheet.

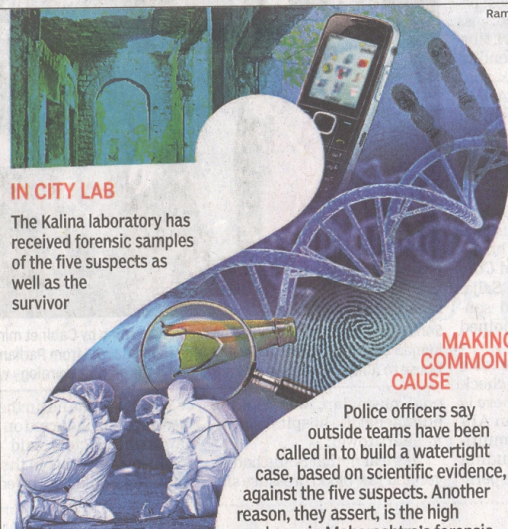
According to some experts, the outside forensic teams may draw earth samples from the crime scene and compare it for pollen with the clothes of the accused men and the survivor to establish that the offence took place there. Others, however, wondered if anything useful can be found after the passage of five days, particularly since the city has received intermittent rain during this period.

Mumbai police chief Satyapal Singh confirmed that the assistance of two more forensic labs has been sought to boost evidence collection. "They will gather more forensic samples. Their expertise will help produce prompt reports, which should facilitate us in making a watertight case. Medical and forensic evidence will be marshalled and attached with the chargesheet," Singh said. He added that the cell-phones of the five suspects are simultaneously being studied "us-

SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION

While the Forensic Science Laboratory in Kalina works on analysing the evidence collected thus far in the Shakti Mills case, the Mumbai police have enlisted more help. Teams

from Central Forensic Science Laboratory in Hyderabad and Gujarat Forensic Science Laboratory have been brought to Mumbai to gather fresh evidence



IN CITY LAB

The Kalina laboratory has received forensic samples of the five suspects as well as the survivor

MAKING COMMON CAUSE

Police officers say outside teams have been called in to build a watertight case, based on scientific evidence, against the five suspects. Another reason, they assert, is the high pendency in Maharashtra's forensic laboratories



STILL UNDECIDED

> The six forensic labs in the state suffer from pendency of over 70,000 cases

> Biology-serology and toxicology departments have the highest flow of cases. They also have the highest pendency

> DNA fingerprinting of over 1,500 samples are awaited

> The count of toxicological samples needing testing long lost

ing high technology".

A senior official from the state home department said it has sought cooperation from various forensic labs in the country.

The N M Joshi Marg police on Monday submitted to the Kalina FSL forensic samples gathered from the five suspects as well as the gangrape survivor. The lab's director Dr M K Malve said the results of tests on the samples will be made available in five days; "cloth and blood samples of the accused will be used for DNA analysis". He maintained that the backlog of

cases, including 1,500 DNA fingerprinting samples, will not impact the investigation in the Shakti Mills case since it is top priority. He said he was unaware that forensic agencies from two other states have been asked to look into the case.

Dr Rukmini Krishnamurthy, a former director of Kalina FSL, said earth samples from the crime scene may be used to compare the pollen or microbes in it with the samples of soil found on the clothes of the accused and the survivor: "This can become strong corroborative evidence," she said.

Take policemen off VIP security duty, demand activists

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: The sexual assault on a young photojournalist last week reinforces the need for swift implementation of police reforms, including re-direction of personnel deployed on VIP security to policing the streets, say activists.

Citizens and activists held a sit-in on Monday evening at Hutatma Chowk to urge the state government to remove policemen from guard duty so they can focus their energies on law enforcement instead. "Mumbai has only 34,000 policemen against the sanctioned strength of 41,400, a shortfall of 7,000," said Dolphy D'souza of Police Reforms Watch.

According to city activists, the ratio of policemen per lakh population in Mumbai is much lower than the global standard of 220. They also maintained that a sizable chunk of the total force was assigned to VIP and VVIP security in 2012. Moreover, they said, it was only recently that the government sanctioned Rs 15 crore as investigation budget. Until then, policemen spent their own money on travelling for investigations.

Following the sexual assault on the 22-year-old woman last Thursday, state home minister R R Patil had said that local police would accompany journalists on risky assignments. On Monday, the protesters questioned this "knee-jerk reaction", asking whether the state would provide a policeman for every child going to school or every housewife heading for the local market.

In 2006, the Supreme Court, while hearing a petition filed by a retired cop, had issued a series of directions. This included a security commission at state level; transparent procedures for the appointment of police chief and desirability of giving him a fixed tenure; separation of investigation work from law and order duties; and a new Police Act to reflect the democratic aspirations of the people.

In April this year, attorney general G E Vahanvati had presented a chart on the lackadaisical manner of implementation of the seven-year-old verdict by state governments. The apex court had then said that at least the appointment of state security commission should be implemented well.

The National Human Rights Commission, the Ribeiro Committee and the Soli Sorabjee Committee had recommended it to be a multi-member body with sufficient representation from the civil society and the judiciary. The importance of this was to make sure that cases are investigated with swiftness and fairness, with no undue influence from any source. The apex court had observed that the lower rungs of the police are made to stand for hours on VIP duty without provisions for food or water. "This forces them to pressure vendors to provide free food and water. The seniors do not take care of them, leading to pent up frustrations."