Delhi court finds Uber driver guilty of rape

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An Indian Uber taxi driver was convicted Tuesday of raping a young female passenger in the capital last year, a case that sparked fresh fears in a city plagued by sexual violence.  
  
Uber was banned from operating in New Delhi in the aftermath of the December 5 attack, which sparked accusations it failed to conduct adequate background checks, although the ban has never been fully enforced.  
  
The Delhi court found Shiv Kumar Yadav guilty of raping the 25-year-old woman as she returned home from dinner with friends in the Indian capital.  
  
“He has been convicted and found to be guilty for all charges against him, which include rape,” public prosecutor Atul Shrivastava told AFP after the verdict was delivered.  
  
He will be sentenced on October 23 after being convicted on four charges — rape, abduction, intimidation and causing harm.  
  
Defence lawyer Dharmender Kumar Mishra said his client would appeal the verdict at a higher court after a careful study of the latest judgement.  
  
“I have to see on what grounds my client was convicted. The investigation was completely flawed in this case,” Mishra told AFP.  
  
Shortly after the attack it emerged that Yadav had been accused of assaulting other women, although he had no previous convictions.  
  
Yadav was tried by one of the fast-track courts introduced in 2013 following the fatal gang-rape of a student on a bus in Delhi, a crime that sparked nationwide protests about India’s treatment of women.  
  
The Uber rape occurred days before the second anniversary of the attack on the bus, which earned Delhi the title of India’s “rape capital” and shone a harsh spotlight on the issue of violence against women.  
  
The victim in the December 5 attack, who cannot be named for legal reasons, said she had dozed off in a taxi while returning home from dinner with friends.  
  
She told police she woke to find the taxi parked in a secluded place where the driver assaulted and raped her, before dumping her near her home in north Delhi.  
  
Women’s rights activists applauded the fast-track court for “quick dispensation of justice” in a country where cases can drag on for years in an understaffed and overburdened legal system.  
  
“I think it (the verdict) is extremely important in times when we are getting more and more incidents of sexual violence,” Ranjana Kumari, head of the Delhi-based Centre for Social Research, told AFP.  
  
Tuesday’s judgement comes days after a toddler and a five-year-old girl were raped in separate attacks in New Delhi.  
  
India recorded 36,735 rape cases in 2014, with 2,096 of them in Delhi alone. Experts say those figures are likely to represent only the tip of the iceberg.  
  
– ‘Brought to justice’ –  
  
Uber, which resumed operations in the capital earlier this year despite the ban, said it had learnt lessons from the case and made improvements to its checks and customer support.  
  
“Sexual assault is a terrible crime and we’re pleased he has now been brought to justice,” Amit Jain, Uber India president, said in a statement on the verdict.  
  
The California-based startup’s rapid international growth has sparked tensions in several countries, with rival taxi companies protesting that Uber cars are not subject to the same regulations.  
  
It set up its India operation in September 2013 and now works in around a dozen cities.  
  
The company and its Indian rival Ola applied for formal licences to operate as radio taxi companies after they were banned from operating in December.  
  
Authorities in Delhi rejected Uber’s application, saying it had failed to comply with requirements for a licence including a GPS system to track taxis and police-verified badges for drivers.  
  
But last week the federal government published new guidelines for web-based ride-hailing firms, a move seen as a boost for Uber and Ola’s battle for legal status and licence approvals.  
  
It proposed that ride-hailing firms equip their taxis with emergency alarms as well as in-app features to help passengers call the police.  
  
It also called for extensive criminal background checks on drivers, specifying they “must be of good character”.