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India's stats on student deaths in Canada sit heavily on family of London hit-and-run victim

Indian ministry cites natural causes, accidents, medical conditions, attacks among causes of deaths

Angela McInnes · CBC News · Posted: Sep 18, 2024 5:00 AM EDT | Last Updated: 4 hours ago

Roshan Mathew, left, sits with his brother-in-law, Jibin Benoy, in an undated photo. The two were close when they came to Canada from Kerala, India, with hopes to study at college and obtain their permanent residencies. Two years ago, Benoy was killed in an unsolved hit-and-run while riding his bike home from a late shift at his part-time job. (Submitted by Roshan Mathew)

A 29-year-old man who was killed in a hit and run on Sept. 18, 2022, after coming to London, Ont., is among 172 students from India who have died in Canada over the past five years for a range of reasons, according to the Indian government.

Jibin Benoy is included in Indian Ministry of External Affairs statistics that indicate the number of students from that country who died between 2019 and July

2024 is higher in Canada than anywhere else in the world.

The deaths in Canada have largely been attributed to natural causes, accidents and medical conditions, with nine described as being "due to attacks."

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Benoy was killed cycling home at 4 a.m. from his part-time job at a downtown fast-food restaurant in September 2022. The second-year international student was enrolled in operations management at Fanshawe College, juggling school and work to make ends meet.

"I think nobody cares about the life of the students here," said Benoy's brother-in-law, Roshan Mathew, who came from Kerala with Benoy to Ontario to study and now works in Prince Edward Island. "His father and mother, they are still grieving their son's death and I don't think that they can ever recover from that."

Benoy, 29, was a student at Fanshawe College in London, Ont. (Facebook)

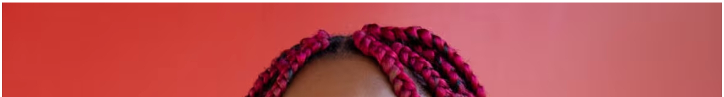
While Benoy's death made headlines, the reasons others died remain a mystery. CBC News made multiple requests to the Indian government for details on cause, location and names of the deceased.

Death toll of Indian students by country from 2019 to July 2024	Totals
Canada	172
United States	108
United Kingdom	58
Australia	57

Source: Indian Ministry of External Affairs

"It's really alarming, concerning and shameful," Adaeze Mbalaja, chair of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS)-Ontario, said when she learned of the Indian government's numbers for Canada.

"What we're seeing across the board is the exploitation of international students. Our institutions and our governments, who like to profit off of international students, particularly from South Asian communities, aren't doing enough to stop it."



Adaeze Mbalaja, chair of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS)-Ontario, says governments and schools need to better protect international students. (Submitted by Adaeze Mbalaja)

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While the causes of the deaths are varied, experts who work with international students wonder if the statistics are due to the high number of Indian students studying in Canada.

More than a million international students came to Canada at the end of 2023, according to the Canadian Bureau for International Education, with 41 per cent of them from India — the highest of any group. Overall, Canada's international student population grew by 63 per cent in the past five years.

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"That number [of international students] is extremely large considering the total size of the population of the country," Toronto immigration lawyer Sergio R. Karas said. "No other country in the Western world has so many foreign students per capita."

Country	**Number of international students in 2024**	**Country's population**	**International students per capita**
Canada	1,040,985	39,826,185	0.02613821
United States	1,503,649	345,815,485	0.00434813
United Kingdom	446,924	69,226,548	0.00645596
Australia	168,470	26,767,314	*0.00629387*

Source: ApplyBoard, Kitchener, Ont.

He added that these foreign students have been arriving as Canada's cost of living is higher than ever amid an affordable housing crisis. International students also pay four times the tuition compared to Canadian students.

Earlier this year, Ottawa put a cap on the number of study permits that colleges and universities are allowed to allocate, recognizing institutional "bad actors" and the impact on the housing market.

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In some cases, students would arrive only to find they've been the victims of fraud and their prospective schools didn't even exist, forcing them to work full time, contrary to the conditions of their study permit.

Other students who were properly enrolled would often struggle to make ends meet while studying and living in substandard housing.

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"It's a whole web," said Karas. "The program is just too large — it's unmanageable. There are holes you can drive a truck through. The government should declare a moratorium on study permits for at least three years."