

Rape and murder suspect held

Indian cops find main perpetrator hiding after burning teen alive

NEW DELHI: Indian police said they have arrested the main suspect in the latest gang rape-murder to shock the country as protests took place over a separate high-profile sexual assault case.

The rape of a 16-year-old who was later burned alive in the eastern state of Jharkhand is just the latest to have shone a spotlight on how India handles sexual violence cases.

The accused Dhanu Bhuiyan was found at a relative's house where he was hiding after he and accomplices allegedly burned the girl alive on Friday.

The local village chief was also among 15 people detained in the case while the teenaged victim's

family have been given special police protection.

Police said Bhuiyan became enraged after the local village council ordered him to do 100 sit-ups and pay a 50,000 rupee (RM2,950) fine following the rape.

Bhuiyan and his accomplices then allegedly attacked the girl's parents before setting their house on fire with the girl inside.

Police inspector-general Shambhu Thakur said the "main suspect" had been arrested and a post-mortem would be carried out.

"We are on the case and we promise the family that the guilty won't be spared," he said.

Thakur said the village head had been arrested since he "announced

a punishment that led to murder".

Village councils of elders often settle disputes in rural India, bypassing a lengthy and expensive judicial system. Although they carry no legal weight, they exert massive daily influence.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Raghubar Das has called for stringent punishment in the "barbaric" case and announced compensation of 100,000 rupees (RM5,900) for the victim's family.

Indian authorities have faced renewed pressure to act over sexual assault since the recent gang rape and murder of an eight-year-old Muslim girl by a group of Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir state.

Amid mounting outrage, the gov-

ernment has changed the law to allow execution for child rapists.

But the Jammu case has revived communal tensions. Protesters backing the Hindu suspects yesterday hurled stones at the car of a Jammu and Kashmir state minister, Sham Lal Chaudhary, demanding a new inquiry into the case, media reports said.

The crowd in the Kathua district where the gruesome murder took place surrounded Chaudhary before police stepped in.

Hindu groups have held regular protests saying that the police inquiry was biased against the accused. Muslim activists have in turn taken to the streets to demand justice for the dead girl. — AFP