

Indian protesters seek end to sexual violence against women



NEW DELHI (AP) — Thousands of people protested across India on Sunday to seek an end to sexual violence against women, which has been on the rise in the country.

Carrying banners and placards, protesters marched in New Delhi, Mumbai and other cities, demanding that India's government quickly prosecute rape suspects. Candlelight vigils were also held in some places.

The outrage was triggered by the rape and murder of an 8-year-old girl in the Indian-controlled portion of Kashmir and the abduction and rape of a teenage girl in India's northern Uttar Pradesh state.

Many protesters expressed particular anger at India's ruling Hindu nationalist party for initially siding with the accused in the Kashmir case. The young victim was a Muslim and the accused are Hindus.

A total of at least nine suspects, including a lawmaker from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and four police officials, have been arrested in the two cases.

Violent crime against women has been on the rise in India despite tough laws enacted in 2013. In 2012, the fatal gang rape of a young woman in New Delhi triggered massive protests by hundreds of thousands to demand stricter rape laws in the country.

The outrage over the New Delhi attack spurred quick action on legislation doubling prison terms for rapists to 20 years and criminalizing voyeurism, stalking and the trafficking of women. Indian lawmakers also voted to lower to 16 from 18 the age at which a person can be tried as an adult for heinous crimes.