

Ukraine in Uproar as Rape Victim Buried

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KIEV — Civic activists in Ukraine called for a full criminal investigation into the rape and fatal torture of an 18-year-old woman, who was buried Saturday.

Oksana Makar died Thursday from injuries sustained when she was gang-raped, half-strangled and set on fire by three young men in a southern provincial town.

Hundreds of people took to the streets in Mykolayiv after news leaked out that police had released two of the three suspected attackers, apparently because their parents have political connections in the region.

The two men were rearrested and police were disciplined after the intervention of President Viktor Yanukovich, who sent an investigating team to the town.

The Segodnya newspaper website quoted a senior Interior Ministry official on Saturday as saying all three suspects will now be charged with murder.

Makar was buried in her home village of Luch in a white coffin and wearing a white wedding dress, a Ukrainian tradition in the case of the death of a young unmarried woman.

The case has thrown a focus on the weak state of the justice system in Ukraine, where the well-connected and wealthy and their families appear able to escape prosecution by giving bribes or applying political pressure on police, prosecutors and judges.

A regional civic activist, Yuri Krutsylov, said Saturday after the funeral that people in the region would monitor the prosecution of the three accused closely.

"We have lawyers. We are working with them, and we will personally monitor this affair," he said.

"If it is not transparent and done correctly we are ready to come out [on to the streets] and give a reminder that we are following things," he told Channel-5 TV.

The victim's mother, Tatyana Sirovitskaya, told Segodnya on Friday: "My daughter has died. But she has jolted Ukraine. I hope now that just half of the bastards who do terrible and shocking things will be punished and will not be able to buy their way out."

Makar met two of the three accused in a local bar March 9 and after spending some time there, she went with them to the apartment of the third.

Reports say she was raped and that one of the attackers tried to strangle her with a cord. They wrapped her in a blanket, took her to a pit and tried to set her on fire before escaping.

She was found by a passing motorist and taken to a hospital with serious burns. Both of her feet and one of her arms were amputated before she died, media reports said.

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