

Suspect held in slaying

Killing of girl, 7, wasn't racially motivated: cops

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — A black man was arrested and charged with murder in the killing of a 7-year-old black girl in a drive-by shooting authorities said Sunday appeared to be a case of mistaken identity, not a racially motivated attack, as her family had feared.

Jazmine Barnes' family had described the gunman in the Dec. 30 slaying as a white man driving a red pickup and believed race played a role in the shooting.

But acting on a tip received by a civil rights activist, the sheriff's department zeroed in instead on Eric Black Jr., 20, a black man who admitted he was driving a dark-colored SUV from which a passenger



Eric Black Jr. says he was driver.

HARRIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE VIA AP

said in a brief phone interview that he was feeling "a bit of relief right now" after the arrest.

The shooting took place at a stoplight while Jazmine, her mother and three sisters were on their way to the grocery store.

At a court hearing early Sunday, prosecutors said a confidential source had contacted the sheriff by email and told him the killers had "shot the car by mistake," thinking the vehicle was someone else's that they had seen earlier that night. Prosecutors did not say why the killers opened fire.

The sheriff said there was, in fact, a red truck at a stoplight just before the shooting, but the driver did not appear to have been involved. Gonzalez said it was dark, the shooting happened quickly, and the truck was probably the last thing seen by Jazmine's family.

Authorities want to talk to the person in the red pickup to get his account of the

crime, Gonzalez said.

Black, who was arrested Saturday afternoon during a traffic stop, was charged with capital murder and jailed without bail. Court records did not list an attorney for him. Prosecutors said the 9-mm handgun believed used in the shooting had been recovered from Black's home.

During Sunday's hearing, prosecutors said Jazmine's mother, LaPorsha Washington, had tried to drive to a hospital after the shooting, but one of her front tires had been shot out.

After the shooting, a composite sketch of a white man in a dark hood was widely circulated.

Jazmine's family and activists had said the shooting was similar to an unsolved incident in the area in 2017 in which a gunman described as white shot into a vehicle carrying at least two black people.

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, a black Democrat who represents parts of Houston, said there was

nothing irresponsible about the early suggestions it was a hate crime. She said the case had the positive effect of encouraging people to discuss race in the U.S.

The girl's killing prompted an outpouring of support for her family from celebrities and ordinary people across the country. On Saturday, hundreds gathered at a rally near where the shooting happened, holding balloons, stuffed animals and signs that read, "Justice for Jazmine."

A \$100,000 reward, raised in part by Shaun King, the journalist and activist who received the tip that helped police, was offered for information leading to an arrest.

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner said the support Jazmine's family received provided law enforcement "with a sense of urgency and made Jazmine's loved ones know they weren't alone in their time of grief. We share their deep sense of loss and anger," Turner said.

Utilities agree to take down tall steel poles

BY MARK HARRINGTON

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LIPA and PSEG Long Island have agreed to remove 24 tall steel poles and instead bury the power line along a busy section of roadway in Eastport following an outcry from residents and a lawsuit by Brookhaven Town.

The cost of the makeover could reach \$13.5 million, PSEG said.

Under terms of a settlement, PSEG will remove the steel poles along a mile-long stretch of Eastport Manor Road from Sunrise Highway south service road to a LIPA substation on Montauk Highway. The poles, which are around 80 feet tall and some 9 feet around, are set in concrete foundations and carry heavy high-voltage transmission lines. The poles were placed in spring 2017 on LIPA rights of way near homes, businesses and a shopping center.

The agreement doesn't address the nearly 200 additional steel poles that remain on a bucolic stretch of County Road 51 from Eastport to Riverhead in the pine barrens. Brookhaven Supervisor Edward P. Romaine, who said he was "happy" about the settlement, nevertheless expressed "concern" about

the remaining poles, which have already been struck at least twice, once resulting in a traffic fatality.

"We are gravely concerned about the traffic safety aspect of these poles being so close to the roadway in what appears to be a violation of federal and state highway safety standards," Romaine said.

PSEG spokesman David Gaier said the poles on Route 51 "were placed in compliance with, and meet all, applicable permitting and regulatory requirements."

PSEG said removal of the steel poles on Eastport Manor Road and burying the power line are expected to be completed in 2020 after "permitting, procurement, engineering studies and design" work. Gaier said the cost, estimated between \$9 million and \$13.5 million, would not "create an incremental increase for ratepayers," coming from the utility's capital budget.

Nearly all LIPA costs are ultimately paid by ratepayers.

PSEG chief operating officer Dan Eichhorn said the agreement, reached after talks with State Sen. Kenneth LaValle (R-Port Jefferson) and Assemb. Fred Thiele (I-Sag Harbor), "upholds



The steel poles on Eastport Manor Road in Eastport.

our commitment to provide safety, reliability and customer satisfaction."

PSEG in 2017 had previously agreed

to remove the nearly one-mile stretch of poles, but withdrew the agreement after Brookhaven sued.