

Indonesia, Sept 23 (Reuters) - Indonesian police have detained 18 people in the eastern province of Papua for hoisting a separatist flag, police said on Tuesday.

The Morning Star flag is the symbol of the Free Papua Movement (OPM) and is outlawed in Papua, where independence activists have waged a campaign for nearly 40 years to break away from Indonesia

A group of Papuans hoisted the flag in the town of Timika at the weekend, local police chief Godhelp Mansembra told Reuters. No other details were available.

Separatist protests have increased in Papua in recent weeks. About 1,000 people marched through the capital, Jayapura, last week to demand a referendum on Papuan independence.

The march came days after a string of bomb blasts at an airport in Papua and near a copper mine run by the local unit of U.S. mining firm Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold Inc. (Reporting by John Pakage; Editing by Sugita Katyal and Sanjeev Miglani)