

## India district bans cell phones for unmarried women

Published: 24/11/2010 at 02:00 PM

Online news: [Asia](#)

A local council in northern India has banned unmarried women from carrying mobile telephones to halt a series of illicit romances between partners from different castes, media reports said Wednesday.



Photo illustration. A local council in northern India has banned unmarried women from carrying mobile telephones to halt a series of illicit romances between partners from different castes, media reports said Wednesday.

The Baliyan council in Uttar Pradesh state decided to act after at least 23 young couples ran away and got married over the last year against their parents' wishes.

"The panchayat (assembly) was convinced that the couples planned their elopement over their cell phones," village elder Jatin Raghuvanshi told the Calcutta Telegraph.

The rules of inter-caste marriages are complicated and extremely rigid in many rural communities in India, with some lovers even murdered in "honour killings" by relatives trying to protect their family's reputation.

"All parents were told to ensure their unmarried daughters do not use cell phones. The boys can do so, but only under their parents' monitoring," said Satish Tyagi, a spokesman for the village assembly.

Caste discrimination is banned in India but still pervades many aspects of daily life, especially outside the cities.

Traditional Hindu society breaks down into brahmins (priests and scholars), kshatriya (soldiers), vaishya (merchants) and shudra (labourers). Below the caste system are the Dalits, formerly known as "Untouchables".

Caste categories often determine Indians' life prospects, and conservative families will only marry within their own caste sub-division.

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