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

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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