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Nepal minister forces Mumbai temple marriage to end: Report

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Kathmandu, June 2 (IANS) Under growing public fire for conferring state honours on controversial security personnel, Nepal's coalition government Wednesday caused fresh outrage when the official media reported that a minister had fuelled caste discrimination by forcibly separating a couple from different communities.

Dan Bahadur Chaudhary, the state minister for industry, had forced a young woman to be separated from her husband because they belonged to different communities, the state-run Gorkhapatra daily and its sister publication, the Rising Nepal, reported Wednesday.

The incident occurred in Kapilavastu, the district in Nepal's southern Terai plains, once part of the kingdom ruled by the Buddha's clan but now riven by caste feuds, poverty, illiteracy and superstition.

During his ongoing visit to his home district Kapilavastu, the minister ordered the administration to forcibly separate Sarita Chaudhary from her husband Taulan Kohar because Kohar belongs to a community that is regarded as a low caste in the rigid social hierarchy in the terai.

The couple fell in love despite fierce objections from the woman's family and eloped to Mumbai in India to get married, the reports said.

Nine months ago, they tied the knot in a Mumbai temple. Though the marriage was accepted by the man's family, the 25-year-old bride said her family tried to break it up.

They filed a police complaint charging Kohar, 28, with abducting Sarita for the purpose of trafficking.

This week, the minister went on a visit to Kapilavastu when he ordered the district authorities to forcibly remove Sarita from her in-laws' house and send her back to her parental home in Pakadi village, the reports said.

Sarita reportedly fought the separation, saying she was an adult and free to marry whoever she wanted. She also threatened to kill herself if she was not allowed to return to her husband's home, the dailies said.

While Chaudhary could not be contacted immediately, his ministry in Kathmandu said they could not comment on the matter since it was a personal matter and not related to official work.

Inter-caste marriages remain a contentious issue in both Nepal and India where families frequently resort to force, false police complaints and even killing to stop them.

Last year, the Nepal government announced an incentive of Nepali Rs.100,000 (about \$1,270) to each couple from different castes who decided to tie the knot.

The gesture was meant to end discrimination against Dalits, the community at the bottom of the social ladder who are still treated as untouchables though the country has officially abolished the practice of untouchability.

It triggered protests by women rights activists who said the money would spawn malpractices and do little to help women. Instead, they had asked the government to invest the money to provide education and employment opportunities to women.

More than a dozen ministers in the coalition government of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal face allegations of corruption and high-handedness, including assaulting senior government officials.

However, the prime minister, fighting an ultimatum by the opposition Maoist party for his resignation, has been concentrating on his survival, to the detriment of other issues.

His government missed a deadline last month when it failed to promulgate a new constitution.

Now there is a fresh countdown to crisis as the time given to him by the Maoists to quit expires at Wednesday midnight.



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Inter- caste couple separated with minister's pressure

Kapilvatu, June 1 - The District Administration has forcefully brought an end to the conjugal relation of an inter-caste couple after nine month of their marriage under the pressure of a minister and human rights activists

State Minister for Industry Dan Bahadur Chaudhary forced the administration to separate upper caste Sarita Chaudhary of Pakadi-3 from her lower caste husband Taulan Kohar of Abhirab-1.

Sarita was handed over to her parents in the presence of the human rights workers.

According to the parents of Kohar, 28-year-old Taulan and 25-years-old Sarita got married about nine months ago on their own will and now the administration separated them against their wish.

Parents of Chaudhary were involved to separate the couple because the woman belongs to high caste and rich family, said Kohar parents.

Kohar's parents had requested police, local administration and human rights activists not to separate their son from daughter-in-law as she was happy with her husband.

Minister Chaudhary, who is also from Pakadi arrived in Kapilvatu on Sunday night from Kathmandu and put pressured on Chief District Officer (CDO) Laxman Thapa to break the relations of the couple.

Despite the fact that the muluki ain (Civil Code) has guaranteed the peoples' rights to marry as per their wish after reaching 20 years old, the law couldn't work on the case of Chaudhary and Kohar.

Taulan Kohar said that not only the CDO and Chief Police Officer but even the Human right activists stood against them.

Chaudhary, who had been staying under the protection of police, was later sent back to her husband's home with the joint effort of administration and human right activists. But her parents took her back to their home.

Sarita said she was happy with her husband. "They separated us against our will."

Wiping her tears, she said, "My parents have been against our marriage so they are threatening and giving us mental tortures."

"If they don't allow us to live together, I'll commit suicide and my father, mother and administration will be responsible for this," the distraught woman issued a warning.

Kohar and Chaudhary tied into a nuptial knot at Jeudani Temple of Mumbai of India about nine months ago. Later Chaudhary's family filed a case against Kohar in India accusing him of being involved in women trafficking.

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