

Indian excesses trigger exodus

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DANG, June 2 - More than 2,000 people from 22 bordering villages of Dang district have already fled their homes fearing persecution and sexual harassment from Seema Surakshya Bal (SSB), the Indian border security force, and various other armed Indian groups.

The displaced continue to swarm a community forest of Satbariya VDC-2 in Deukhuri region.

The victims say there was no option but to flee the continued harassment, abduction, rape and robbery.

The latest abduction victim, 19-year-old Krishna Thapa of Khir village of Rajpur VDC-9, was reportedly abducted by an armed group on May 18. Villagers allege Thapa has been kept in a house across the border and is being sexually abused.

It has been over a year since Rana Bahadur B.K., 58, of Khangra village of Rajpur VDC-7 lost two of his daughters. B.K. said his daughters were visiting their elder sister at Satbariya but never returned.

"I now hear that both my daughters have been sold in India. I don't know when I will see them," he said.

Seventeen girls have disappeared from bordering Patauli, Sunpathri and Kalyani areas in the last three years.

"They raid our homes and take away our women. When we try to protest they threaten to kill us," said Prakash Pun of Rajpur VDC-9. "We can't do anything."

Very few abducted women return. Most of them fall prey to SSB men and other Indian criminal outfits while collecting fodder and firewood in the forest. "We either have to submit or be shot dead," said Lila Gharti of Biruwa village at Bela VDC-2.

Even going to bordering Indian villages to buy foodstuff and essentials has now become a horror.

"In the name of interrogation, SSB men keep our women captive for months and abuse them," said Krishna Gharti of bordering Gobardiha village. "Men are usually freed after some roughing up, but they keep the women." He said things have worsened in recent days. "With no one around to protect us we eventually decided to flee."

The Indian side has set up SSB units along the Nepal-India border at every 10 metres, but there are no such security provisions on the Nepali side. Instances of crime and encroachment of Nepali land in Dang district have gone unattended due to absence of any mechanism to keep a tab on border security.

Displaced villagers have demanded that the government set up border security camps in their villages immediately so that they can return home.

Chief District Officer Rishiram Dhakal said border security camps can only be established after inspecting the border region. "We've heard about the plight of these villagers and the concerned ministry has also been informed. We'll shortly be sending a fact-finding team."

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