

▶ **Ex-Bal Mandir Employee, Student Held On Rape Charge**

KATHMANDU, June 18: Two individuals previously associated with Nepal Children's Organization (NCO), one of the country's oldest orphanages, have been taken under control by police for investigations into a rape charge leveled against them by three minor girls.

The Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) of Nepal Police arrested a former NCO student and a former NCO employee - identified as Rabin Chalise and Rabin Shrestha respectively - after three minor girls living in NCO's Naxal orphanage, also known as Nepal Bal Mandir, complained about being sexually exploited.

SP Pitambar Adhikari, spokesperson for the CIB, confirmed the arrest of Chalise and Shrestha but refused to divulge details. "Both are now in our custody for investigations," said Adhikari. "But, we are not yet in a position to divulge any details."

A team of CIB officials had arrested the two on Tuesday. The same day, the CIB, in coordination with the Central Child Welfare Board (CCWB), shifted the three minor girls to a safe house run by some other NGO. All three girls are believed to be below 15 years of age. They say they had been facing exploitation for a long time but mustered the courage to speak up only recently.

Subash Pokharel, general secretary of NCO, however, maintained that none of the girls living in any Bal Mandir orphanage has had to be rescued in recent weeks. "All the girls are with us," he said. He also claimed that neither Chalise nor Shrestha are associated with the NCO. "I don't know what ties they had with NCO in the past," he said. "They are currently not affiliated with us. Whether they had any ties with the NCO in the past makes no difference. Whatever they do should not be linked with us."

However, sources said that Chalise is chairman of a club of former NCO students and enjoyed easy access to the Bal Mandir orphanages. As for Pokharel's denial of rescue of the three minor girls, a CIB official involved in the investigation said that the girls are officially still with NCO. "They have been shifted just for the time being," said the official. "We did it considering the possibility that their continuing stay at the same orphanage might affect our investigations in some way."

The CIB swung into action after Action for Child Rights International (ACRI), an NGO, drew police attention to the matter. In a statement issued on Friday, ACRI said that initial investigations and medical evidence were strong enough ground for the police to arrest Chalise and Shrestha.

This news item is printed from myrepublica.com - a sister publication of Republica national daily.

© Nepal Republic Media Pvt. Ltd. Kathmandu Nepal.