

## Minister's induction in Bihar cabinet questioned

Five days after ruling Janata Dal-United (JD-U) legislator Bhagwan Singh Kushwaha was inducted into the Nitish Kumar ministry, widows of three brothers in a Bihar village have questioned the move.

The three men were allegedly killed in a gun battle with the police Aug 25, 2006 in Nawadaben village in Bhojpur district, 70 km from here. Their widows have accused Kushwaha of plotting the murders and asserted that the gun battle never took place.

They now fear they would be deprived of justice with Kushwaha being made a minister.

'This is shocking. When he could engineer the killings as a mere legislator, he would easily influence the cause of justice as a minister with more money and muscle power,' said Rita Devi, one of the women.

'I have lost all hope of justice now,' concurs Sita Devi, the mother of the three brothers.

A backward caste leader in his 40s, Kushwaha is among 19 new faces inducted by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in his cabinet. He has been given the rural development portfolio.

The police allegedly gunned down the brothers, Ram, Lakshman and Bharat, claiming they were criminals. Their family members and villagers have claimed that they were not criminals and that the police killed them at Kushwaha's instance. The legislator has denied this.

Last year, the widows and other family members staged a protest in New Delhi. They sought the intervention of National Human Rights Commission and demanded a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry into the deaths. The government decided to recommend a CBI probe.

The mother of the brothers fears the new minister could eliminate her only surviving son, Satrugan Singh, who has been fighting a legal battle.

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