

Chechen Police Chief Marries Teen Bride Amid Mounting Scandal

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The 17-year-old bride with her groom. Magomed Daudov, head of Kadyrov's administration, is on the far left.

A Chechen district police chief was married Saturday to a 17-year-old local girl, weeks after reports that she was being forced to wed the already-married official sparked an uproar in Russia's media sphere.

The bride, identified as 17-year-old Kheda (Luiza) Goylabiyeva in reports, looked pale in video footage filmed at Grozny's civil registry, where she married Nazhud Guchigov, who is reportedly somewhere in his late forties to mid-fifties. Russian media initially reported that Guchigov was 57, before later claiming he was in fact 46.

The marriage has caused a stir among Russian media outlets, which Kadyrov has accused of inaccurately depicting the situation and meddling in the couple's private lives.

The scandal emerged late last month after investigative newspaper Novaya Gazeta reported that Goylabiyeva was being forced to marry a local official three times her age. According to the report, Guchigov had launched an intimidation campaign against Goylabiyeva's parents, giving them an ultimatum to surrender their daughter.

Guchigov initially denied the claims made in the Novaya Gazeta report, insisting that he was not planning to take a second wife.

Kadyrov said earlier this month he was upset that the story had been picked up by national media outlets, dismissing the republic's media and information minister for mismanaging the scandal.

"I am sure those who unceremoniously interfered for a long time in the private lives of Nazhud and Luiza will answer [for their actions] in court," Kadyrov wrote on Instagram Friday. "The appropriate actions are already being prepared."

Kadyrov posted Saturday a video of himself dancing at the wedding. The Chechen leader wrote that he had seen the stamps placed in the newlyweds' passports, a formality for married Russian couples. Yet under Russian federal law, second marriages — which are permissible in traditional practice for Chechen men — cannot be registered as official partnerships.

A reporter from the Kommersant newspaper claimed that the woman who registered the wedding at a civil registry strongly resembled Chechen journalist Asya Belova. The head of Kadyrov's administration, former Chechen militant Magomed Daurov, was also present in the room where the registration was taking place.

Kadyrov, who had taken to Instagram to invite any of his one million followers on the popular photo-sharing site to attend the wedding, insisted that all legal norms, religious practices and local traditions had been respected.

The Russian Civil Code states that 18 is the minimum age for marriage but contains clauses that allow for marriage at 16 in certain cases.

Children's rights ombudsman Pavel Astakhov sparked a scandal last week by coming out in favor of the right of older men to marry teen brides.

"Emancipation and sexual maturity come earlier in the Caucasus, let's not be hypocritical. There are places where women are already shriveled by the age of 27, and look about 50 to us," Astakhov told Russian News Service radio on Thursday.

He later apologized in an Instagram post, saying that women of any age were "wonderful and delightful."

Earlier this month, he said that he could not confirm that the 17-year-old bride's rights had been violated by virtue of the marriage, which at that point had not yet happened, according to Russian media reports. He then lauded Kadyrov for his role in reducing the number of early marriages in Chechnya.

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