

Indian gov't to raise abandoned girls

AP Associated Press

Sun Feb 18, 11:36 AM ET

The Indian government plans to set up a series of orphanages to raise unwanted baby girls in a bid to halt the widespread practice of aborting female fetuses, according to a senior government official.

Dubbed the "cradle scheme," the plan is an attempt to slow the practice that international groups say has killed more than 10 million female fetuses in the last two decades, leading to an alarming imbalance in the ratio between males and females in India, Renuka Chowdhury, the minister of state for women and child development, told the Press Trust of India news agency in an interview published Sunday.

"What we are saying to the people is have your children, don't kill them. And if you don't want a girl child, leave her to us," Chowdhury told the agency, adding that the government planned to set up a center in each regional district.

"We will bring up the children. But don't kill them because there really is a crisis situation," she said.

On Sunday, police arrested a gynecologist and janitor at a hospital near the central Indian city of Bhopal after the discovery of nearly 400 bones from fetuses and newborns in a pit behind the hospital. It is believed they are the remains of unwanted baby girls.

Many districts in the country of more than 1 billion people routinely report only 800 girls born for every 1,000 boys. According to the latest census figures in India, the number of girls per 1,000 boys declined from 945 to 927 between 1991 and 2001.

Asked if the scheme would not encourage parents to abandon female infants, Chowdhury said: "It doesn't matter. It is better than killing them."

Discrimination against girls stems from the low value attached to females in Indian society. Girls are seen as a burden on the family, requiring a large dowry which many poor families cannot afford. Females are generally the last to be educated or to get medical treatment.

Tests to determine the gender of a fetus are outlawed in India and the government says it is clamping down on doctors who break the law.

But social activists say there are many loopholes which allow those who provide tests to remain free. Since the law was enacted in 1994 only one doctor has been convicted.

Chowdhury did not say how much the orphanage plan would cost but said money had been allocated in the next budget for it. Officials in her office could not immediately be reached for comment Sunday. It was not clear when the first orphanages will open.

Copyright © 2007 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. The information contained in the AP News report may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without the prior written authority of The Associated Press.

Copyright © 2007 Yahoo! Inc. All rights reserved.

[Questions or Comments](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) - [Terms of Service](#) - [Copyright/IP Policy](#) - [Ad Feedback](#)