

# Unwanted girls to be renamed at grand ceremony in Satara

**Health officials find 255 children called 'Nakusa' by their families**

Mumbai: Hundreds of girls from the Satara district of Maharashtra will be given new names at a grand ceremony Friday after being called 'Nakusa', or the unwanted one, by their family.

Authorities hope that by renaming 255 children and teenagers they can take steps towards changing the mindset of parents, who use the name Nakusa or Nakushi when expecting a son or when they already have daughters.

The practice was relatively unknown until district health officer Dr Bhagwan Pawar stumbled across several girls with the name.

Health officials launched a drive to identify more children called by this name and have so far found cases in Javli, Patan, Mahabaleshwar, Khandala, Maan, Phaltan and Khatav, including 16 in Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan's hometown of Karad. All the girls are under 18, the youngest just seven months.

## Sex ratio

Speaking to *Gulf News* from Satara, Dr Pawar said: "Satara's health factors are high compared to other districts of the state but the only area it lags behind is the sex ratio of 881 females for every 1,000 males.

"For the last two years, we have been promoting awareness programmes to protect the girl child and renaming of these girls will be one of our prominent projects."

Selection of the names has been left to the parents and the girls themselves to decide.

Vijay Sawant, district media officer, told *Gulf News* that the girls came from extremely poor families.

"Many of the parents were also illiterate," he said. "We want to see the changes that come about in these girls after being given a name. Imagine their plight when they grow up and find they have no name."

## Ceremony

With the aim of ending this practice and accepting girls as equal to boys, district officials have organised a public renaming ceremony tomorrow which will be attended by Supriya Sule, Nationalist Congress Party leader and daughter of Union Minister Sharad Pawar, the state health minister, and other VIPs.

The day will also be marked by a procession with young girls dressed as some of India's women achievers including President Pratibha Patil, badminton player Saina Nehwal, the late Indian-born American astronaut Kalpana Chawla, and the late prime minister Indira Gandhi.