

State concerned over cradle snatching

DUBIOUS RECORD Govt agrees that Bihar tops the country in child marriages with 69% marrying under 18

Binod Dubey
 ■ hiplotters@hindustantimes.com

PATNA: The incidence of child marriage in Bihar is the highest in the country, the state government admitted in the legislative council on Thursday.

Quoting the findings of the National Family Health Survey -3, social welfare minister Praveen Amanullah said with 69% of young getting married below the legal age, Bihar topped the list of states where child marriages are common.

She, however, assured the house, that the government had initiated effective measures to contain the menace. Apart from implementing the provisions of the Child Marriage Prevention Act, it had launched an awareness drive to educate people about the ill effects of early marriage.

The government was also encouraging general public to inform the designated officials

VILLAGE OF SHAME

Each house in this village has ten members!

Binod Dubey
 ■ hiplotters@hindustantimes.com

MATUK BIKHA (NAWADA): Matuk Bigha village in Nawada district is usually short on baby girls. For, they have either become wives, or mothers! Situated between Nawada and Gaya, the village has a total population of around 2000 people, where 50% of the girls in the age group of seven to 14 years have been married off. Some of them have even delivered babies, while others are pregnant. Yet some others are waiting to join their husbands. Sample the case of Babita, who was married at the tender age of 10. She does not know the

name of her husband, nor has she any clue about her in-laws. "She is deranged and doesn't understand anything," said her mother, Iwanti Devi. Then, why did you marry her off? To that question, she says: "Because, I can't rear her and bear the burden of her treatment," without showing any sign of repentance on her face. The saddest part of the story is, that since her marriage, Babita's husband has never visited his wife. Wrapped in a torn red sari, she listlessly wanders along in Matuk Bigha.

But Babita is not alone. There are many like her in the village, who have become victims of the age old practice of child mar-



Girls who had been married at an early age along with their mothers and relatives (standing) at Matuk Bigha in Nawada district.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

CHILD MARRIAGE

Pregnant twice before attaining 16!

Binod Dubey
 ■ hiplotters@hindustantimes.com

SALUPTHA (NALANDA): It took the life of their only son to make them understand their grave mistake. At that time, the tie had been cast. Six of their seven daughters had already been married off at an age, when they ought to have gone to schools or play with tops. "My son died apparently because he could not stand the mental trauma he had to suffer after getting married very tender age," said Damyanti Devi of Salehpur village in Nalanda district. Her son Babu had committed suicide, a few days after his marriage, when



Damyanti Devi with her daughters, who were married off as minors.

he had just joined secondary school. "We married him off thinking he would settle early in his life," said she adding, "But we couldn't comprehend the vice

is a farm labourer and somehow manages to eke out a living. The plight of Damyanti's family is not an isolated instance in Nalanda, which has earned the notoriety of being one of the few districts in Bihar where child marriages still thrive. Surveys conducted by various organisations suggest that 64% of women below the age of 18 and 58% males below the age of 21 are married in the district, which was once the cradle of education and ancient Indian culture. However, there are remarriages in the districts, where 90% of children get married before they attain the legal age of marriage.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Buddha

Sukumar Deb Nath
 ■ hiplotters@hindustantimes.com

NOLKATA: Taking a leaf from the book of his Bihar counterpart Nitin Kumar Dergal chief minister Buddhadasa has announced on Friday an assurance 35,000 cycles would be released free among students of Class 9 and South 24 Parganas. "The Bihar chief minister's plan of giving bicycles to girls was one feet outstanding success JDU-BJP alliance membership elections a year. The cycles will be

chayat. She said that the cooperation of the people at large was essential to curb the practice.

The minister also said that her department might consider appointing officers, especially to prevent the high incidence of child marriage.

BJP member Kiran Ghai Sinha, who had raised the issue, was, however, not satisfied with the government reply. The answer was not direct and did not deal with the queries separately, she said, adding that the matter was serious and the government steps were not sufficient enough to eradicate the menace.

She said that SDOs and BDOs, who were already overloaded with developmental activities, had been given the task of eradicating the practice. This showed the seriousness of the government towards the problem, she added.

DISTURBING FACTS

The *Hindustan Times* had highlighted the issue last month saying that despite the existence of the Child Marriage Prevention Act, the age-old practice was rampant in Bihar districts, particularly in Nalanda and Nawada, where children in the age group of 11 to 13 were being married.

The report had said that there were certain villages, where 905 of children got married before they attained the legal age of marriage.

Most of the children, who were married, did not remember when their marriage had taken place. They did not even know the whereabouts of their life partners and were thoroughly disinterested in their future, the *HT* had noted.

■ A facsimile of the reports on underage marriages as published in *HT*.

about the incidence of child marriage, she said. They could bring it to the notice of either sub-divisional officers or the block development officers or the sarpanch of the gram pan-