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Orphanages in Ernakulam under police scanner

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Probe finds suspected case of child trafficking by some institutions

On July 27, about 28 inmates of an orphanage at Thayikkattukara near Aluva, will board a train from here along with a team of police officers and social workers.

The children - 25 of them hailing from Assam, two from Manipur and one from Bihar - are being sent back to their home States after a police investigation found that they were trafficked to Kerala. Based on the finding, authorities will now be handing them over to their parents in the presence of child welfare authorities.

During investigation, orphanage authorities failed to produce documents, including certificates from the local Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and the police, for transporting the children to another State.

The move by the Ernakulam Rural Police in association with the CWC is the latest in a series of operations carried out in the region over the past one-and-a-half years. The operations are being coordinated under Operation Muskan- a drive to track the children who have separated from their parents.

“About 60 children, including 17 girls, rescued from an orphanage in Kuruppampady, and 12 Odisha natives from Angamaly have been sent back to their homes during this period. The number of children being sent back this year may touch 100 by December,” said Baby K.G, an officer with the Juvenile Police Unit.

Commenting on the issue, a top officer with the Ernakulam Rural police said some orphanages in the region were found bringing children from other States, mostly from the poverty-stricken north-eastern region, through agents after paying money to their parents.

“We suspect that at least some of the 153 orphanages are into the business of bagging sponsorships by exhibiting children. A task force has now been formed to verify the

credentials of inmates at these institutions,” the officer said.

As part of the drive, the police have requested the public to contact the helpline number 100 or Childline number 1098, child protection unit number 209177, woman helpline 1091, and railway protection force number 182 in case of any suspicious appearance of children.

People can also contact officers of the special juvenile police unit at 94979 33136 or 94979 62210.

Officials of the CWC Ernakulam also raised suspicion about some orphanages resorting to child trafficking as an indirect way of making money.

“In most cases, orphanages are found bringing children from other States without the mandatory clearance from the Board of Control of Orphanage as well as the local CWC. Besides money making, we also suspect these shady institutions of using children to counter the fall of divisions in certain schools,” said Padmaja Nair, Chairperson, CWC Ernakulam.

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