



'There were a lot of baby farms': Sri Lanka to act over adoption racket claims

Government to launch inquiry after health minister admits that babies were taken from mothers and sold to foreigners for adoption in 80s

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Sri Lanka is to launch an investigation into adoption fraud following claims that thousands of babies were sold to foreign nationals in the 1980s.

Rajitha Senaratne, Sri Lanka's health minister, said the government would set up a DNA databank to enable children adopted abroad to search for their biological parents and other relatives, and vice versa.

In an interview for a television documentary, to be aired in the Netherlands on Wednesday, Senaratne acknowledged the existence of illegal "baby farms" in Sri Lanka in the 1980s. Children

were either bought or stolen before being sold to westerners for adoption, the programme makers allege.

“There were a lot of baby farms back then,” Senaratne said. “They collected the babies there and sold them to foreigners for adoption.”

Senaratne said it was the existence of such facilities that prompted the Sri Lankan government to suspend inter-country adoption. The rules were altered after a high-profile case involving the discovery of 20 newborn babies and 22 women held in “prison like conditions” following a police raid in 1987. The number of adoptions by foreign nationals subsequently plummeted.

The makers of *Zembla*, a Dutch current affairs programme, claim that the records of Sri Lankan children adopted in the Netherlands during the 1980s were widely falsified.

A series of interviews with doctors, brokers and those involved in adoption schemes in Sri Lanka paints a grim picture of a racket involving the abduction of newborns from hospitals. The abducted babies were allegedly handed over to “acting mothers”, who pretended to be the biological mothers, before the children were sold on for adoption.

More than 11,000 babies were adopted by western countries from Sri Lanka in the 1980s, the programme makers said. While 4,000 ended up in the Netherlands, others went to the UK, Sweden and Germany, claims the documentary.

One woman told the programme that she was informed her baby had died shortly after birth at a hospital in Matugama, but that a family member saw a doctor carry the infant out of the hospital alive.

Another claimed that “someone connected to the hospital” had paid her to pretend she was the child’s biological mother. She said: “They asked me to act as a mother. Then they gave me 2,000 rupees.”

The documentary makers allege that doctors and nurses acted as intermediaries for western adoption agencies. One broker told the programme women were impregnated to meet the demand for adoptive children.

When told about allegations of false adoption papers, acting mothers and babies stolen from hospitals, Senaratne said: “The government should take this very seriously. We will have to set up a special agency where parents and children can have their DNA tested. This provides an easy method of finding out if it is the real mother or not. I will take the initiative for this.”

He added: “It happened in an illegal manner, it’s very wrong. It violates the human rights of these families. This needs to be looked into.”

Zembla: Adoptiebedrog - Deel 2, will be broadcast on BNNVARA, NPO2, on Wednesday 20 September at 9.15 pm

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