Netherlands launch investigation into irregularities in adoptions from Sri Lanka

Sept 25, Colombo: The Government of Netherlands has launched an investigation into the irregularities in adoptions from Sri Lanka following the revelation in a Dutch TV program of abuses in adoption practices during the 1980s.

In its broadcast of 20 September, the Zembla television program reported on abuses with regard to adoption procedures in Sri Lanka.

In response to the revelation, the Dutch government in a statement said the State Secretary has ordered an investigation into the roles and responsibilities in the adoption process at the time, as well as how legislation was enforced and which organizations and individuals were generally involved.

The Netherlands government said at the time when those adoptions from Sri Lanka took place, the legislation in force was less adequate than it is today, and the adoption procedures that were followed differ from the current ones due to changes in the various responsibilities and duties.

The State Secretary for Security will discuss the matter with a number of relevant organizations and contact the Sri Lankan authorities. Based on the outcome of these discussions, the Dutch government will decide whether to take further action, the statement said.

Dutch investigative journalists have said that at least 11,000 babies adopted by foreign couples were either bought or stolen from their parents.

Last May, in the broadcast of 'Adoptiebedrog' (Adoption Fraud), ZEMBLA revealed that adoption records of children adopted from Sri Lanka to the Netherlands during the 1980s had been falsified on a large scale.

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

Sri Lanka will also launch an investigation into the adoption fraud claims that thousands of babies were sold to foreign nationals in the 1980s, the Minister of Health Dr. Rajitha Senaratne said.

Minister Senaratne acknowledged the existence of illegal "baby farms" in Sri Lanka in the 1980s and said that the Sri Lankan government should take these claims "very seriously."

Full text of the statement:

In its broadcast of 20 September last, the Zembla television programme reported on abuses with regard to adoption procedures in Sri Lanka.

The State Secretary for Security and Justice regrets that certain individuals appear to have had other interests at heart than those of the child, which would be better served by the provision of details such as the child’s identity and parentage. It is conceivable that those adopted as children may be deeply affected by the findings in Sri Lanka and desire clarity about their background and adoption procedure.

Thorough procedures are of the utmost importance, which is why adoption legislation has been tightened significantly over the years. Further measures to this effect have been set out in the letter dated 31 January 2017. However, the same letter makes plain that these measures do not entirely preclude future irregularities. The new government will discuss the future of intercountry adoptions with the House of Representatives in due course.

At the time when the aforementioned adoptions from Sri Lanka took place, the legislation in force was less adequate than it is today. Moreover, the adoption procedures that were followed differ from the current ones due to changes in the various responsibilities and duties.

In the meantime, both the Netherlands and Sri Lanka have acceded to the Hague Adoption Convention, which provides additional safeguards. Among other things, all adoption cases must now be approved explicitly by both Central Authorities, subject to a thorough verification of adoption documents. Nevertheless, irregularities can unfortunately never be eliminated entirely.

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will discuss the matter with a number of relevant organizations and contact the Sri Lankan authorities. Based on the outcome of these discussions, the Dutch government will decide whether to take further action.

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