

India orders children's shelters checks after sex abuse cases

NEW DELHI: India has ordered the inspection of at least 9,000 shelters for abandoned and orphaned children after a wave of sex abuse scandals shocked the country, a minister reportedly said.

Maneka Gandhi, the country's women and child development minister, told The Indian Express newspaper in an interview published on Wednesday that the probe would include background checks on the owners and managers of homes.

Authorities have been jolted into action after reports this month uncovered the sexual abuse of more than 30 girls at a state-funded shelter in Bihar state.

Police this week detained five people over alleged abuse at a shelter in Uttar Pradesh state where 24 girls were rescued after one escaped to tell investigators of mistreatment at the home.

"I have asked the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) to ensure that the social audit is completed for all childcare institutions within the next 60 days," Gandhi said, according to the newspaper. The inspections will look at basic amenities and living conditions for children, she added.

A 2017 government study revealed that half of the estimated 9,000 childcare institutions in India were unregistered.

The minister acknowledged there may be other unrecorded homes and called for the creation of central shelters for women and children in each state. "That's the only way we can keep them

safe," she told the Indian Express, adding that government funds could be given for new homes.