

# New toilets for India's poor, crime-hit village

August 31 2014

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More than 100 new toilets were unveiled Sunday in a poverty-stricken and scandal-hit village in northern India, where fearful and vulnerable women have long been forced to defecate in the open.

Sanitation charity Sulabh International handed over the brightly coloured structures to cheering villagers in Uttar Pradesh state, just weeks after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced every household should have a toilet within four years.

Defecating in the open is a major social and health issue in India, particularly for millions of women who face harassment and assault when venturing after dark into [village](#) fields to squat.

"The toilets will give our lives a new meaning," said Premwati Devi, a 45-year-old mother of five, at the unveiling ceremony in Katra Shahadatganj village.

"We now won't have to wait until dark to relieve ourselves. We can use the toilet as and when we want to," she told AFP, standing proudly next to the blue and pink painted facility outside her thatched-roof hut.

More than 500 million Indians defecate outdoors, according to the World Bank, particularly in poor, rural areas such as Badaun district in Uttar Pradesh, leaving them exposed to diseases.

The village of Katra Shahadatganj in Badaun was thrown into the spotlight in May when two teenage girls were found hanging from a tree

after they were thought to have gone outside to relieve themselves.

Police are investigating whether the cousins, aged 14 and 12, were gang-raped before they were lynched, sparking uproar that echoed the fatal gang-rape of a student on a New Delhi bus in December 2012.

India's top Central Bureau of Investigation has not yet laid formal charges against anyone in the case.

In his Independence Day speech earlier this month, Modi spoke of the indignity facing women who still have to wait until the cover of darkness to go outside and defecate.

"Can you imagine the number of problems they have to face because of this?" he said.

Spurred on by Modi's comments, Sulabh donated the toilets—which cost about 45,000 rupees (700 USD) each to build—to homes in the village with plans for more.

"After a survey we have found some 400 households in adjoining villages don't have a toilet. We will cover these households in the next stage," Bindeshwar Pathak, who founded Sulabh, told AFP.

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