

## State to give saplings to families of infant girls

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**K**OLKATA: For the first time, the state Panchayat and Rural Development department has taken up a unique initiative to support the girl child. Numerous couples, who have daughters below the age of five years, have been given saplings and have been urged to grow them like their daughters. The project will be launched on August 15 in Nadia.

The move will encourage afforestation in rural Bengal. Besides, the parents could even sell the trees and help their daughters to either get higher education or get

them married when they reach the appropriate age. If the project becomes successful, the scheme will be introduced in every gram panchayat. Five gram panchayats have been selected for the purpose, namely Palashipara, Karimpur II, Narayanpur II, Kasthadanga I and Nagarukhra. The department carried out a survey to identify parents whose girl child is aged between zero days to five years. In Palashipara, 101 families have been identified. Similarly, in Kasthadanga and Narayanpur, 35 and 68 families have been identified respectively. In case the parents do not have the land to grow the tree, they could plant the saplings in the areas surrounding a river or canal or by the side of roads. The families will be given the right of the tree, also known as brikkha patta. Saplings of

Sal, Segun, Mehagini, Domar and Lambu will be distributed among the parents.

These trees normally take 20 years to become fully grown and fetch good prices as their logs are used to make furniture. Awareness camps have been set up to spread awareness among parents and make them understand that they should get their daughters married only after they complete higher education and become economically independent. A senior official of the Panchayat and Rural Development department said that of all the saplings planted, 80 per cent would survive and this would help the families to become self-reliant. "The project is a unique one and will change the economic scenario in rural Bengal in the next few years," the official said.