

Kids killed by bloodthirsty bone merchants

RUTHLESS BONE traders in India allegedly kidnapped and killed 1,500 children a month for their skulls, which were then exported abroad.

Reports of the traders' bloodthirsty business practices are said to have prompted a governmental ban on the trade in human skeletons, much in demand at medical schools around the world, according to a story in *Omni* magazine.

The reports indicated that the children were kidnapped in Bihar and their skulls sent to Calcutta for export to 23 countries, adds Dr Dean Edell, editor of *The People's Medical Journal*.

One official, who asked

By **EDDIE BEA**

not to be named, admits the government was reluctant to clamp down on the trade, which brought in badly needed foreign currency.

"It was a nightmare to even contemplate such a



thing could occur," he says. "Who could believe people would be so savagely systematic?"

"But eventually we had to act. The rumors and reports were too much to ignore. A full-scale in-

vestigation has been launched."

The ban on the skull trade has made skeletons even more valuable. Prior to the scandal, India had been the world's largest supplier of skeletons for medical research.

Now there is a worldwide shortage, says Henry Galiano, owner of *Maxilla and Mandible*, one of America's leading bone shops.

"It's a great loss," he says. "Would you want to be operated on by some guy who's been playing with

**1,500
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each month
for skulls!**

plastic for eight years? I wouldn't."

Medical schools use human skeletons to teach doctors-in-training anatomy and surgical technique.

Plastic bones are the only alternative to real skeletons, but most doctors feel they lack the neces-

sary detail for use in medical instruction.

Since selling any body part is now illegal in the United States (Galiano gets his human bones from Europe) and doctors lack both the training and equipment to supply themselves, the price for a human skeleton has soared.

An average skeleton used to cost \$500, but now can be worth as much as \$5,000.

Galiano believes it would take millions to resurrect the bone business in the US because of the technology, chemicals, and facilities involved.

The corpses of prisoners and unclaimed bodies from hospitals used to supply skeleton producers in the US, but today the general public would have to be encouraged to donate their bones if a skeleton trade were to start here again, he adds.

Even then, he says, there might be a problem — finding someone to do the job.