

A diminutive entrepreneur ^{child labor 18-2-02-News} ^{children}

The farther authorities are from a major city in Pakistan, the less likely they are to pursue violators of the child-labour laws. To leave Lahore, the nation's intellectual and commercial center, is to enter a land populated and run by children. The change is as abrupt as it is extreme.

The roads just beyond the city limits are congested with donkey carts, all of them driven by teamsters of eight or nine. Boys seem to have a monopoly on roadside attractions: gas stations, auto-repair centers, restaurants. When one pulls into the Star Petroleum Station on the Ferozepur Road, five miles from Lahore, three boys rush out of the garage to service one's car. They are twelve, eight, and seven, and wear uniforms intended for men twice their size. The eldest has rolled up his pants and sleeves, but his colleagues helplessly trail theirs in the dirt. While the older boys fill the tank with a rusted hand pump, the youngest climbs onto the hood and cleans the windshield with a dangling leech.

When one pulls away, the boys rush back to the garage and a diesel engine they are attempting to rebuild between

fill-ups. No adults are visible on the premises.

Adults are also in short supply at the crossroads markets that provide villagers with everything from prayer mats to surgical instruments. Twelve of the fifteen stands at the Tohkar Road market are managed by children under fourteen. The fruit stand is run by a tyrannical eight-year-old boy and his four-

and seems to regard his exertions as routine. So do the passersby. And, for that matter, so does the boy.

His name is Fayyaz. A lively nine-year-old, he has been working as a hauler since he was six. He attended school for two years, but dropped out when an elderly neighbour offered him an advantageous lease on the cart and donkey. He runs the

children, one finds one's self hoping during the journey there that the children one sees working in fields, on the roads, at the marketplaces, would prepare one for the worst. They do not. No amount of preparation could have lessened the shock and revulsion one feels on entering a sporting-goods factory in the town of Sialkot, seventy miles from Lahore,

their parents or speak to strangers outside the factory.

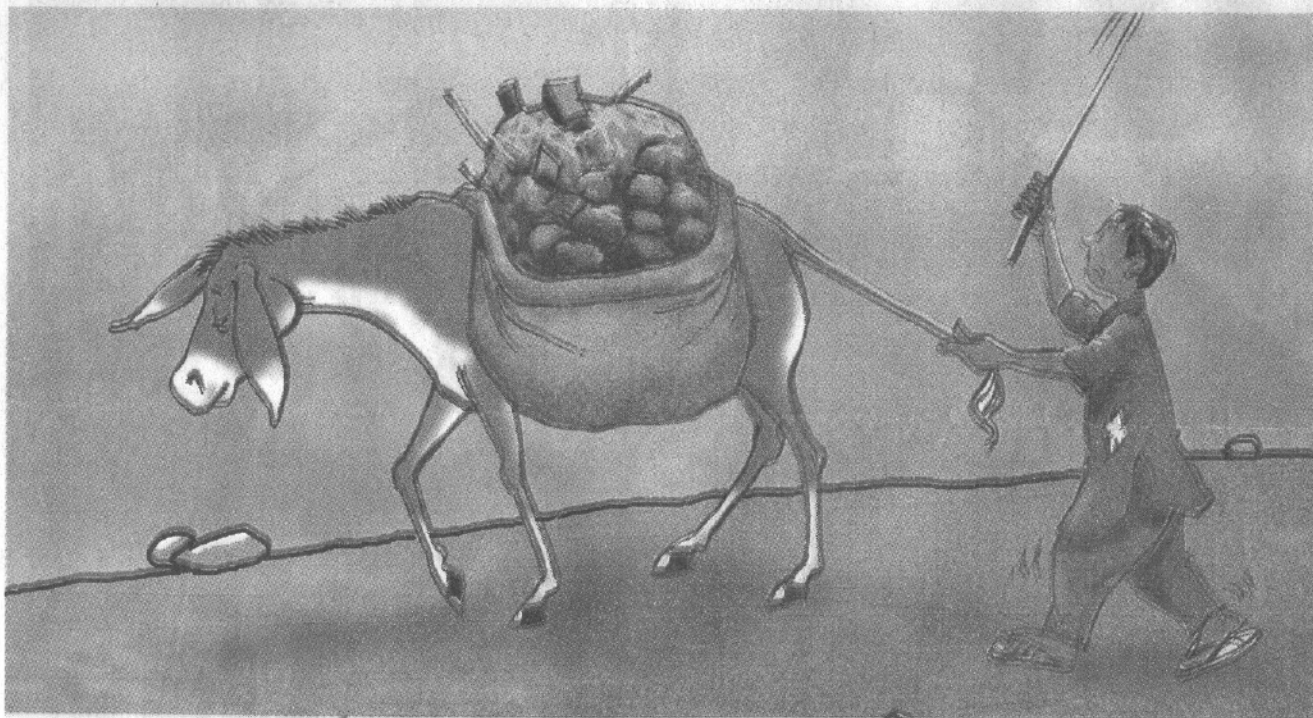
A partial list of 'infractions' for which they may be punished is tacked to a wall near the entrance. It's a document of dubious utility: the children are illiterate. Punishments are doled out in a storage closet at the rear of the factory. There, amid bales of wadding and leather, children are hung upside down by their

development. The attacks are not always verbal. Last June a Norwegian trade-union delegation was attacked at the Sialkot sporting-goods factory by three or four armed men who were believed to work for the factory's owner. The delegation's guide and cameraman were severely beaten and the latter required hospitalization. The police characterized the attackers as 'civic-minded' and warned the delegation against inspecting other area factories and 'unnecessarily antagonizing factory owners.'

More common, though, is the industrialist who ushers the foreign investigator into his office, plies him with coffee and cake, and tells him in his friendliest manner that child labour is a tradition the West cannot understand and must not attempt to change. "Our country has historically suffered from a labor shortage, a deficit of able-bodied men," says Imran Malik, a prominent Lahore carpet exporter and the vice-chairman of the Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

"Children have compensated for this shortage. They have worked when adults could not. They have helped construct Pakistan's infrastructure and advanced its industry. For thousands of years children have worked alongside their parents in their villages. The work they now do in factories and workshops is an extension of this tradition, and in most ways an improvement on it. The children earn more than they would elsewhere. They contribute significantly to their family's security and raise their standard of living."

The industrialist's argument is accurate only in its assertion that Pakistani children have traditionally worked with their families. But children seldom worked outside the family until the 1960s, when the Islamic Republic made a dramatic effort to expand its manufacturing base. This led to a spectacular



and five-year-old sisters. The boy spends his morning slicing melons with a knife half his size, while behind him the girls sort cartloads of fruit. At the next stall two eleven-year-old cousins fashion sandals out of discarded tires. They work from dawn to dusk six days a week, and make more than 1,200 pairs each week.

Behind the last stall another boy is struggling to unload a

business alone, and spends his days scrounging for hauling jobs and shuttling produce, scrap metal, and crafts around six villages. He averages sixty miles a week — no easy feat with a donkey that trots at three miles an hour. "The work is painful and the days are long, but I earn enough to feed myself and tend the donkey," Fayyaz says with an entrepreneur's pride.

The key to his success is

where scores of children, most of them aged five to ten, produce soccer balls by hand for forty rupees, or about \$1.20, a day.

The children work eighty hours a week in near-total darkness and total silence. According to the foreman, the darkness is both an economy and a precautionary measure; child-rights activists have difficulty taking photographs and gathering evidence of

knees, starved, caned, or lashed. (In the interests of economy the foreman uses a lash made from scrap soccer-ball leather.) The punishment room is a standard feature of a Pakistani factory, as common as a lunchroom at a Detroit assembly plant.

The town's other factories are no better, and many are worse. Here are brick kilns where five-year-olds work hip-deep in slurry pits, where adolescent girls stoke

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Behind the last stall another boy is struggling to unload a stack of carpets from his donkey cart. He weighs seventy pounds. The twenty-odd carpets in his cart weigh sixty pounds apiece, and it takes him ten minutes of yanking, hefting, and cursing to get each one into the stall. The stall's proprietor watches him with interest, but his concern is strictly for the merchandise. He is a tall, heavyset forty-year-old who looks as if he could unload the entire cart in fifteen minutes without breaking a sweat. But he makes no move to help the boy,

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The key to his success is underbidding the competition; his rates are a tenth of his predecessor's. "It is reasonable that people should pay me less. My equipment is the same as an adult's, but I am small and have a fraction of an adult's strength. I take longer to make deliveries, so I must charge less. My hope is that the more goods I move, the stronger I will get and the more I can charge."

On arranging a trip to a town whose major factories were rumored to enslave very young

darkness is both an economy and a precautionary measure; child-rights activists have difficulty taking photographs and gathering evidence of wrongdoing if the lighting is poor. The silence is to ensure product quality: "If the children speak, they are not giving their complete attention to the product and are liable to make errors." The children are permitted one thirty-minute meal break each day; they are punished if they take longer. They are also punished if they fall asleep, if their workbenches are sloppy, if they waste material or miscut a pattern, if they complain of mistreatment to

no better, and many are worse. Here are brick kilns where five-year-olds work hip-deep in slurry pits, where adolescent girls stoke furnaces in 160 degree heat. Here are tanneries where nursing mothers mix vats of chemical dye, textile mills where eight-year-olds tend looms and breathe air thick with cotton dust.

When confronted with questions from a foreigner about their use of child labour, industrialists respond in one of two ways: they attack the questioner or they deliver a lengthy lecture about the role of children in Pakistan's

the 1960s, when the Islamic Republic made a dramatic effort to expand its manufacturing base. This led to a spectacular and disproportionately large increase in the number of children working outside the home, outside the village, at factories and workshops whose owners sought to maximize profits by keeping down labor costs. The rise in child abuse was as meteoric as the rise in child labor. The children working in these factories were beyond the reach or care of their families and were increasingly the victims of industrial accidents, kidnapping, and mistreatment.