

# Their dreams die young

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*Child + en  
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Some 61 per cent of the world's working children are found in Asia. Children beginning work at a young age have a longer period of exposure to cumulative hazards that can cause permanent disability to a child's growing body

lanes, they light their first of many cigarettes, when they wait for a motorbike or a car to take lift to their area of work.

The innocence of youth and the blush of facing the world so early in their lives is still on their cute faces. But, compromises with life will soon rob them off this innocence. It is the rugged world of 9-to-9 that these young,

teach them the science of necessity.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), approximately 250 million children of the developing countries between the ages of five and fourteen work for the upkeep of their houses and families. Among

exposed to harmful pesticides during their formative years. Others who work in construction, manufacturing and automobile repair are exposed to toxic and carcinogenic substances such as asbestos, benzene and mercury.

Children beginning work at a young age have a longer period of exposure to cumulative hazards, carrying heavy loads or adopting unnatural positions during work which can permanently disable a child's growing body. Such children, whose physical development gets cramped during such heavy work at an early age, are likely to have lower earning prospects throughout their adult lives, and they are liable to take up beggary or become street vendors. Their dreams die young.

"We all suffer the same consequences," says Yasin, who goes through the drudgery for economic needs. "We come across the

same treatment, whether we work in a garage, a tailoring shop, at a bungalow, or on the roads. People don't see us as children. We are bread-earners. On the road, the competition is very cruel. The only thing left for us is to continue on this track of minimal survival. Human Rights people call this child abuse, but for us there is no other way. We don't know where to go. I

want to be free and educated, but do I have a choice?"

Yasin, this fourteen-year-old child whose day begins at 6am, works till early evening. For this, he earns a nominal sum, but shares the responsibility for family survival.

In South Asia, Bangladesh and Pakistan share 71 per cent and 67 per cent active children in fishery, agriculture and forestry, respectively. No reliable statistics on child labour exist, and reports that are generated by one agency or the other gen-

*Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said, somewhat alarmed at his own temerity: "Please, sir, I want some more." "What!" said the master at length, in faint voice. There was a general start. Horror was depicted on every countenance. "For more!" said Mr Limbkins ... "That boy will be hung." — Charles Dickens in 'Oliver Twist'.*

**T**HEY come out of their dingy, raw-brick houses in narrow, uneven lanes, at seven in the morning, wearing their rough and shabby over-alls. They make their way through the smelly, garbage-strewn, winding pathways, and are still chewing the last morsels of last night's bread, gulped down with hastily prepared tea. Once out of their by-

undernourished have-nots will have to face for the rest of their lives.

In the slums, at most times of the day, children between the ages of five and eighteen years are absent. Gone to school? Not really. They are probably out there, changing a rusted nut in a garage, or selling papers on the road, or learning the intricate plumbing techniques. When they pass by schools, they stop to look at the students coming out of their classes in their starched uniforms. For a moment they pause, then they move on. Their *ustads*

them, 120 million work full-time, while the rest continue it side-by-side with school and other activities. Some 61 per cent of world's working children are found in Asia, 32 per cent in Africa, and seven per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Asia has the highest number of child workers found in wide-ranging economic activities. Most of them work in agriculture, mines, factories, services and small-scale manufacturing workshops that are generally not covered by national laws. Children who work in agriculture are



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