

# Their dreams die young

with few options, but to be a part of child labour. I met some kids at Machchar Colony, one of the oldest *katchi abadis* of Karachi, who work all night in fish tanks to peel and clean the shrimps. By the time they come back home, they have just about three to four hours of sleep before they get up to go to school. No wonder, then, that when at seven in the morning, they walk towards school, they are almost half-asleep.

There are organizations that provide standard education at their doorsteps. Unfortunately, our governments always overlooked the expenditure on education. So far, in previous years, Pakistan has spent eight per cent on education from its total government expenditure, while its neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, has spent nine per cent, India 12 per cent, and Nepal 14 per cent on this important sector.

Pakistan's teen labour force is active in carpet-weaving, textile, garment, leather and sport goods industries. The carpet industry stands on the delicate shoulders of these young ones. Despite a strong legal framework, child labour is widely spread in the industry. Punjab and Sindh cover the major portion of the looms in factories and home-based units.

The children involved in the carpet industry are in the categories ranging from under-14 to those between 14 and 17 years of age. According to conservative estimates, one million children out of 1.5 million, work as carpet-weavers in the

country. The data on child labour force is unreliable, and the actual number, according to certain reports, varies probably between two and 19 million.

Bonded labour has long been a feature in brick kilns, agriculture, fisheries, shoe-making, power looms and the carpet industry. Trafficked children from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Burma also join this force.

There are reports that say even law-enforcement agencies tacitly support such employers who practice child slavery, forced or bonded labour. It is difficult to compile credible information due to lack of enough matter or official statistics on the subject, but there are witness accounts that say that these children are kept chained to work up to 20 hours every day, seven days a week.

They are kept in small, poorly ventilated rooms that are filled with wool fluff and dust particles. Many of these children suffer from respiratory problems, skin ailments, and chronic colds and weakened eyesight.

A big demand for cheap labour in the agriculture sector is forever there, which results in the employment of minors, because children are docile and more pliant, and they can be hired for a fraction of what is paid to adult workers. It has been reported that children work for 12 to 15 hours during planting and harvesting seasons.

The United States imports tea for millions of dollars each year. Tea leaves are needed to be plucked by small, delicate hands, with

nimble fingers, so these nascent lives help alongside their mothers, to increase the daily income of their household.

Parents from the interior parts of Sindh and Punjab also send their children to urban areas to earn for them. Such kids are frequently tricked, kidnapped and then sold either into prostitution or are trafficked across the international border. Some brothel-owners actively seek children who come from long distances or other countries, because they are powerless, dependent and least able to escape.

Poverty alone, however, explains the increasing sexual exploitation of children. Another factor is the willingness of parents in some countries, such as Thailand, to sell their children into prostitution. The demand for child prostitution can also be attributed, in part, to the rise in international sex tourism, with customers from developed countries exploiting children in developing countries.

In Philippines, for instance, children aged 14 to 16, are tricked into prostitution after their parents sell them to recruiters, promising jobs as domestics or sales clerks in the city. Girls from Bangladesh are lured by false promises of jobs and marriages, and are smuggled into Pakistan, where they are sold into prostitution.

The worst case of kidnapping and child abuse in previous years was reported when sex maniac Jawed Iqbal killed hundreds of children brutally. Many children, particularly from Sri

Lanka, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, are reported to be smuggled as camel jockeys in the various Gulf states. Young boys between four and ten years of age, are sold by their parents to take part in ceremonial events. The cries of these lightweight children propel the camel to run faster. The boys are bound on the back of the camels, resulting in repeated accidents, including deaths.

Many organizations have reported about the horrifying situation of child exploitation and sexual abuse in the NWFP, Sindh and Punjab. Feudalism is alive and active in the flourishing market of child abuse. Many children contract diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis B, gonorrhoea, syphilis, HIV etc. They are malnourished and practise poor hygiene.

The Bureau of International Labour Affairs (ILAB) passed the FY2002 budget in December 2000, which includes \$82 million to support international efforts to eliminate child labour. This budget also includes a new education initiative, which will support programmes that improve access to quality education in areas with a high incidence of child labour.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) protects children from all forms of exploitation and abuse. It's a legal binding, and all states that are a signatory to the Convention must take all effective and appropriate measures to abolish traditional practices prejudicial to the health and education of children.

authorities concerned have no control, incompetence and negligence in performing prayers (Namaz).

One aspect of indiscipline among us, rules in order to perform prayers (Namaz). It is quite a normal sight to see a person standing in front of a mosque on a Friday to save oneself the inconvenience of walking 100 metres, to "double park" and to drive on the wrong side of the road.

However, driving on the wrong side of the road is common. On April 15, around 6.10 PM, (GP 1123) was parked on a busy road, in a charged kerb-parking area, and the driver had gone to perform his prayer. A government vehicle the 'parking attendant' asked him to move.

Quite obviously the driver took advantage of the situation and parked the car without having to pay the parking fee, to the inconvenience to others. It is most unfortunate that in our country make no effort to export the culture which would come under the definition of terrorism.

How is it that the traffic police are not able to control the movement of buses and trucks which are a law unto themselves, overtaking one another, stopping anywhere, pick up and drop passengers. The motorists whom appear to be educated and well-off, around without having the least regard for the road, as they never stick to one lane, always in a hurry to overtake the car ahead, if it means creating a traffic jam, and causing inconvenience to fellow motorists, continuous honking of horns. I don't think they or even the traffic police are quite aware, that the whole of Karachi is a 'silent zone' in the fifties.

Most of the motorists are unaware of the rules regarding 'giving way' to traffic coming from the opposite direction, and to respect the 'Zebra crossing' where the pedestrians have the right of way. Instead of being the safest place for a pedestrian to cross a road, it is the most dangerous. And as a result, people, by and large, are unaware of the traffic rules.

Then we have the highly undisciplined cyclists weaving their way, dangerous and reckless, without lights, in the dark, that the traffic police are themselves fact that bicycles must have a light. 'lights for bicycles' are unheard of in these days gone by, when as youngsters we used to get off the bicycle and became dark and we had forgotten the too well that if the traffic police caught out lights, we would be *challaned*. But different times and the rule of law was a different story.

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