

Child trafficking

Child smugglers show the children they take with them to the Gulf states as their adopted sons. Its the adoption laws which need to be implemented properly



The body of nine-year-old camel rider Sabir Ali who died in Dubai during a race was brought to Pakistan and flown to his ancestral village in Dera Ghazi Khan.

In some ways Sabir was fortunate to be buried in his soil. Sabir is not the first but the latest victim of the human trafficking groups which have been playing with the lives of poor children of the country.

Most children end up with permanent physical or mental damage or both, caused by the trauma of the violent race in which the screams and shrieks of the frightened young jockeys make the camels run faster.

In fact a good number of children die in the course of the race, either tied on to the camel's back or by falling off the cruising beast.

The law enforcement agencies claim to have controlled immigration at all points of exit to help detect smuggling of camel jockeys out of the country but who knows if this business is still thriving.

Its the money involved in the business that keeps it going. The price of each child is estimated to be between 6,000 and 8,000 dirhams, the large part of which goes to the gang operators and once the children reach the place they are given some money as salary or wages.

"Pakistan is a country of origin for young boys who are kidnapped or bought and sent to work as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar where they are used as camel jockeys, for illegal adoption, organ transplant, drug smuggling and forced labour," said Ayesha Moeen, a social worker who works for an NGO.

Religious affiliation with the holy cities of the Arab kingdom persuades many poor families to hand over their children to agents who promise huge salary and other benefits in return and later use the victims as jockeys.

Desire to make quick money pushes many human traffickers with the connivance of the corrupt people in the law enforcement agencies to forge fake documents of the children and transfer them to the Arab states but FIA authorities claim to have busted gangs of Anwar Dogar and Khalid Dobha.

Snags in adoption laws

help the human smugglers carry on their business as they show the victims as their adopted sons on papers.

"Many smugglers carry victims showing them their adopted sons with the help of fake documents and in this way they (human traffickers) manage to dupe the law enforcement agencies," said Maryam Ahmed, a lawyer by profession.

"The Hague Convention which regulates international adoption, must be ratified in order to combat illegal adoptions and children smuggled to Arab states for camel races," she said.

Some human rights activists opined that Arab countries should be forced to sign the international conventions on child rights and NGOs should raise their voice in the International Community to ban the camel race.

They held the indifferent attitude of the law enforcement agencies and the government responsible for the increase in child trafficking in the Gulf for camel race.

Mentioning declining social set up of the country as the main dilemma, Ilyas Butt, a religious person said, "it is a discriminatory socio-economic system and family culture which allows the commodification of children's bodies."

"Non Governmental Organisations and community based organisations should work in partnership with the government to evolve a strategy to curb the menace of trafficking to Arab states which also brings a bad name to the country," he said.

According to data collected from the facts of the reported cases, the human traffickers have their cronies in almost every big shrine province because runaway waif children usually take shelter in the premises of shrines.

Contesting the point that drugs are being supplied to the Gulf by children, FIA inspector Waris Lodhi said human traffickers in the country are the only suppliers of children to their partners in the Gulf and they do indulge in drugs trafficking because of stern punishment and strict checking at the ports.

"Besides working against the smuggled children sexually abused in the Gulf," the FIA official said.

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