



February 2003

Report to the 34th Session of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, September 2003, Geneva.

Information on Bangladesh

Trafficking of boys from Bangladesh to the Gulf States for use as camel jockeys in relation to article 35 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Article 35: States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

Boys in Bangladesh, as young as four years old, continue to be abducted or taken on false pretences to work as camel jockeys in the Middle East. To many families, the traffickers' offer of work appears a chance to give their children a secure future.

However, there is evidence of mistreatment and torture of child camel jockeys by traffickers and their employers, including depriving them of adequate food and subjecting them to physical harm, for example by burning or beating them. The use of children as jockeys in camel racing is itself extremely dangerous and can result in serious injury and even death. The children's separation from their families and their transportation to a country where the people, culture and usually the language are completely unknown means that the children are normally unable to report incidents of abuse.

Evidence of trafficking of child camel jockeys from Bangladesh

In 1998, Jasim Hossain Howlader was tempted by promises of money and agreed to let a trafficker take his son, Najmul, to the UAE to work as a camel jockey. Two and a half years later, in December 2000, Najmul was returned to Bangladesh. By this time he had sustained irreversible damage to both kidneys, probably from being deprived of water in order to make him lose weight. He was taken to hospital in Dhaka, but died on 11 April 2001, aged seven.

On 10 August 2001, the Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers Association (BNWLA) secured the repatriation of two boys from Abu-Dhabi, Ali and Nuru Mia (both eight years old) who had been trafficked to work as camel jockeys.

On 19 December 2001, a feature article for the Xinhua News Agency contained interviews with four young Bangladeshi boys who had been repatriated. They described being beaten and underfed while working as camel jockeys in UAE. The article also referred to another nine year-old boy who lost an eye while working as a camel jockey.

An article in the *New York Times* (29 April 2002) documents the case of Rubel Hussain who was kidnapped by his neighbour in 1995. The trafficker took Rubel, along with her own son Babul, to Dubai to work as camel jockeys when they were only four years old. Rubel was so frightened of the camels that he was put to work tending goats instead, but Babul and another Bangladeshi boy, Nuru Miah, became camel jockeys. Babul broke his arm after falling off a camel, and Nuru was bitten by a camel, leaving a scar on his right hand. Nuru also stated that his food was rationed to make sure he did not gain any weight and he was whipped when he did not do what he was told. Rubel was eventually reunited with his mother when the trafficker was apprehended in Bangladesh in May 2002. However, by this time Rubel no longer spoke Bengali and did not recognise his mother as he had been in the UAE for around six years.

Another case involving a 10 year old boy, Ali Islam, was reported in the *Independent* newspaper in Bangladesh on 28 May 2002. The boy was abducted by a woman while playing near his house in Bangladesh in 1998. The woman sold Ali to a man called Mizan who trafficked him via Nepal and India to Dubai before sending him to work as a camel jockey for a man called Sayeed Awari. Sayeed Awari paid Mizan 300 UAE Diram (\$82) each month for 18 months until 20 May 2002 when Ali Islam said that Mizan was not his father. At this point Sayeed Awari took the boy to the Bangladeshi Embassy in Dubai and provided him with an air ticket for Dhaka where he was subsequently reunited with his parents.

Zakir Mia, a 10 year old boy, was trafficked from Dhaka in 1996 to work as a camel jockey in the UAE. The trafficker presented Zakir as his own son. Zakir worked as camel jockey until the latter part of 2002. Zakir's real father, Sujan, came to the UAE to find Zakir. However, although he traced him, Sujan was eventually returned to Bangladesh on the expiry of his visa. Zakir remained with his employer in the UAE, working as a camel jockey. The Bangladesh Consulate in Dubai subsequently found out Zakir's whereabouts, and rescued him in October 2002. Together with the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training of Bangladesh, they repatriated the boy on November 1, 2002. He was handed over to the BNWLA for rehabilitation, and was finally reintegrated into his family on December 12, 2002. The BNWLA has filed a case against the trafficker.

These cases are part of a much wider problem. On 2 June 2002, Syed Attaur Rahman of the Bangladesh Embassy in Dubai stated that the mission had rescued and repatriated approximately 20 Bangladeshi children in the past few months, who had been working in the UAE as camel jockeys and domestics.

How many boys are trafficked from Bangladesh for use as camel jockeys?

The trafficking of boys to work as camel jockeys is part of a wider trafficking problem in Bangladesh, hence estimates of the total number of children trafficked out of Bangladesh vary considerably. The BNWLA has been working on the child camel jockey issue since the early 1990s. To date it, it has identified and helped to repatriate over 100 boys, aged between 2 to 12 years, trafficked from Bangladesh to the UAE. In addition, the BNWLA has intercepted several trafficking rings, rescuing more than 400 children before they reached the UAE. They reported that trafficking incidents continue unabated. A study by the Centre for Women and Children Studies in Dhaka, Bangladesh, specifically on Bangladeshi boys, found that during the 1990s, 1,683 boys were victims of trafficking. The report noted that the overwhelming majority of these boys were less than 10 years old and most were likely to be used as camel jockeys in

Gulf countries. This report was compiled on the basis of news clippings and therefore may underestimate the number of boys being trafficked.

Legislation prohibiting trafficking and its enforcement

Trafficking in people is strictly prohibited in Bangladesh. The Oppression of Women and Children (Special Provisions) Act 1995 and the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act 2000 (which replaced the 1995 Act) both outlaw trafficking for prostitution and other forms of unlawful exploitation. These Acts provide for the punishment of trafficking with maximum penalties of life imprisonment or the death penalty. In January 2002, Bangladesh signed the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution. The Government also recently adopted a National Plan of Action (NPA) on the sexual exploitation of children and trafficking. Local and international NGOs and UN agencies also contributed substantially to the formulation of the NPA. The NPA is currently being implemented.

Despite efforts by the Government of Bangladesh to eliminate trafficking, the statistics quoted above strongly indicate that legislation has not been effectively implemented to prevent the trafficking of children from Bangladesh. The Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act, 2000, was intended to make prosecutions more effective and also makes provision for the compensation of victims by those found guilty of trafficking. However, statistical information about the progress of trafficking cases is difficult to obtain. The BNWLA supports this by stating that although there is the option to prosecute those involved in trafficking is always a possibility after a child is removed from harm, this seldom happens in Bangladesh. The BNWLA attributes much of this to the fact that many trafficked persons lack confidence in the police and judicial systems; without money and a strong support system, it is difficult to secure a conviction against a trafficker; intimidation and threats are often used by traffickers to prevent a person from taking legal action; and since recruiters and traffickers are sometimes members of the victim's family or community, there is often pressure to prevent the victim from initiating legal action against the trafficker.

The Committee should seek further information on the number of trafficking offences reported, the number of prosecutions initiated and the number of convictions obtained (with sentences) by year since 1996. This would make it easier to see whether the 2000 Act has adequately addressed the problems in the 1995 Act and whether the penalties against trafficking are being strictly enforced.

The report of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2001 included a report on the Special Rapporteur's visit to Bangladesh, Nepal and India, 28 October – 15 November 2000 (E/CN.4/2001/73/Add.2). The visit report also touches on the trafficking of children from Bangladesh for use as camel jockeys. The report states that, according to NGOs in Bangladesh, police and other local government officials often ignore the problem of trafficking, are bribed to look the other way, or are themselves actively involved in trafficking. Clearly if the Government of Bangladesh is to combat trafficking effectively, then government officials must not be indifferent to or involved in the problem. Any perceived complicity by state officials in trafficking will act as a further barrier to the reporting and securing of prosecutions.

The Committee should request information relating to prosecutions initiated specifically against government officials for involvement in trafficking. It would also be important to have details of training programmes that the Government has provided and plans to conduct in the future for appropriate government officials to sensitise them to the problems of trafficking as part of the Government's countrywide programme for the prevention of trafficking of women and children. It would also be useful to have an evaluation of the effectiveness of these training programmes.

Recommendations

Anti-Slavery International calls upon the Government of Bangladesh to:

- sign and ratify the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.
- ensure that traffickers are prosecuted and that victims are adequately compensated.
- ensure that all law enforcement officials who deal with trafficking cases receive comprehensive human rights training specifically on trafficking issues.
- ensure that all Bangladesh Embassy personnel in India, Pakistan and the Gulf States prioritise the investigation and resolution of trafficking cases.