

# West Bengal: a hub for trafficking

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Nov. 28. — West Bengal is a major centre of trafficking of women and children with about 15,000 victims pouring in from Bangladesh and about 10,000 from Nepal annually.

Dr Jasodhara Bagchi, chairperson, West Bengal Commission for Women, today said this was a "conservative" estimate. She was speaking at a workshop on "Trafficking in Women and Children" organised by the West Bengal Human Rights Commission and UN Development Fund for Women.

"The biggest drawback is that the offence of trafficking is not recognised until proved by the victim's rescue," Mrs Indrani Sinha from Sanlap, an NGO, said. Mr Shanker Sen, former DG, NHRC took into account the low number of cases registered by rampant suppression of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act. "In 1999 the number of cases registered under the Act nationwide was 8,500. In fact 66 per cent of the cases registered were from Tamil Nadu alone," he said. Mr Probodh Chandra Sinha, minister for parliamentary affairs, said that inspite of holding seminars and forming committees to monitor the issue, the authorities lacked commitment to address the problem.

"Trials take a long time. We need NGO help for prompt investigation because the judicial process is too slow", Mr Justice Chittatosh Mookerjee said.

THE STATESMAN

# Bangladeshis held over child trafficking for camel races

Ashok Das  
Hyderabad, November 24

TWO BANGLADESHI nationals were arrested by city police while they were trying to smuggle out three children to Dubai for using them in camel races.

Camel races are a popular game among the sheikhs in the Gulf. Young children mostly from Indian sub-continent are used in this sport. The camels are made to run at full speed with the children securely bound to the animal's underbelly.

The spectators enjoy the game as the terrified children cry for their lives. In some cases, the children lose their mental balance and even die in these races. Young children in the 5-6 year age group are preferred for these races. The children are starved so that they are lighter for the camels to carry.

Muslimuddin (26) of Ghazipur district in Bangladesh and Afia Begum (35) of Dhaka, who were illegally transporting three children to Dubai to use them for camel races were apprehended at Hyderabad airport by an inspec-

tor of special branch on Friday evening and the duo was handed over to Begumpet police station for interrogation.

The duo along with the three children reached Kolkata by road from Dhaka and then travelled to Hyderabad by train to catch the Hyderabad-Dubai flight. They chose the Hyderabad route as the fare to Dubai from Hyderabad is said to be cheapest. They boarded the flight to Dubai from here on November 21.

At Dubai airport they were to be picked by a contact, but the contact failed to turn up and they waited at the airport without knowing where to go. Meanwhile, the immigration officials at Dubai found their travel documents to be fake and put them on the return flight to Hyderabad.

The police registered a case under sections 420, 468 and 471 of Indian Penal Code, section 12 (1) (a) (b) of Indian Passport Act and section 14 of Foreigners Act.

Police investigation has so far revealed that Siraj Alam of Bangladesh, who is an agent for transporting Bangladeshi children illegally to Dubai for camel

races, purchased the three children for Rs 60,000 each and handed them over to Muslimuddin and Afia Begum. Two bogus passports were prepared. One passport in the name of Muslimuddin carried the name of Safiq, aged 10 years (actual age: 5 years), as his son. The other passport in the name of Afia Begum (whose age is mentioned as 22 years) endorsed the names of two children Rubel, aged 11 years (actual age: 6 years) and Esak, aged 10 years (actual age: 4 years) as her sons.

It was further revealed that Esak was in fact the real son of Afia Begum while Rubel was her nephew. Safiq was the nephew of Muslimuddin, who is unmarried. The accused were promised Rs 100,000 each in Dubai as well as employment there for a period of five years, besides Rs 60,000 for each child. City police officials said that besides Rs 60,000 for each child, help has been sought from Bangladesh Government through the Ministry of External Affairs to apprehend the agent Siraj Alam and to establish the real identity of the children.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 NOV 2001

# Australian forces board stranded vessel

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, AUG. 29. Australian Special Air Service (SAS) commandos today boarded the Norwegian vessel, Tampa, which has 434 refugees on board, after the captain of the freighter entered Australian waters in a bid to land his human cargo on Christmas Island.

The Tampa was not allowed to dock and Australian troops continue to be on board the vessel in order to prevent it from coming into Christmas Island. The ship was reported to be adrift after the captain ordered the engines of the Tampa to be turned off.

The refugees on board the container vessel will be spending their fourth night at sea after being rescued by the Tampa from certain death on Sunday after their Indonesian ferry began to sink.

In Canberra, the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. John Howard, told Parliament: "The ship is now in the control of the SAS."

Mr. Karsten Klepsvik, a Norwegian Foreign Ministry spokesman,

said if the commandos took physical control of the ship and forced it out to sea that "will be something else and will be a very serious situation".

Norway is also reporting Australia's refusal to allow the Tampa to dock to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Maritime Organisation.

"Norway has so far not asked for direct assistance, but we have given them an orientation about the extraordinary situation on board the ship," the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Mr. Thorbjørn Jagland, said in Oslo.

According to Mr. Jagland, the 1951 International Convention on Refugees made it clear that refugees rescued on the high seas were to be taken immediately to the nearest port and Norway wanted Australia to accept responsibility for the 434 refugees.

That the Australian Government has no intention of respecting international maritime norms (the Tampa captain gave a Mayday signal before sailing into Aus-

tralian waters today) became clear when a Bill was introduced in Parliament to allow the Government to forcibly remove the Tampa from Australian waters.

"The Bill on entry into force will operate from 9 a.m. today," Mr. Howard was quoted as telling Parliament. The Bill will allow the Government to order a vessel and all on board to be taken outside the country's territorial waters even if the captain of the vessel refuses to comply.

People who jump off the ship or are taken away for medical treatment will be returned to the vessel and action taken under the Bill will not be allowed to be challenged in a court of law.

The Australian action was condemned by the Norwegian Prime Minister, Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, who has been in touch with Mr. Howard. "One cannot force a ship which the captain deems unfit to sail into international waters... the Australian Prime Minister did not agree with me," Mr. Stoltenberg was quoted as telling Norwegian radio.

With the Government rushing

through legislation in Parliament and the public support for the Howard administration's actions from the Opposition Labour Party, it is clear that Canberra is charting its own course.

The strategy adopted by the Government is exactly what the anti-immigrant, far-right "One Nation" party has advocated. At a time when the Liberal alliance is in danger of losing power, commando action in the high seas will, the Liberal alliance hopes, bring some voters back to the fold. Interestingly, civil society in the tiny Christmas Island has come out in favour of letting the refugees land.

Several community groups and six of the Island's 10 elected representatives said in a joint statement: "The elected representatives of the people of Christmas Island are ashamed of the actions of the Prime Minister of our country. We believe it is our humanitarian duty to assist the captain and crew of the Tampa and the asylum-seekers by offering safe refuge on Christmas Island," the statement added.

THE HULL

30 AUG 2001

# Jakarta will allow asylum ship entry

REUTERS

JAKARTA, Aug. 28. - Indonesia today said it will allow entry to a ship carrying more than 400 illegal immigrants and let them stay temporarily on humanitarian grounds after Australia rejected the vessel.

"We will accept them on humanitarian grounds. If Australia does not want them where else can they go?" foreign ministry spokesman Mr Sulaiman Abdul Manan told Reuters.

Indonesia had initially rejected the ship's entry.

The Norwegian-registered vessel Tampa responded to an SOS and rescued the asylum seekers on Sunday from a sinking ferry near Indonesia.

The 365 male asylum seekers went on a hunger strike after Australia refused to accept them. Some of the asylum seekers, mainly Afghans, have threatened to jump overboard unless Australia allows them ashore.

Early today, the vessel was holding a position in international waters within sight of the Australian territory of Christmas Island.

Australian troops today landed on Christmas Island and began unloading supplies for an expected humanitarian aid package for a asylum seekers reports from Christmas Island say.

A Reuters photographer said an estimated 35 troops and a medical team, together with food and equipment such as inflatable boats and outboards, had landed in three Australian army Hercules transport aircraft during the day.

"Quite a lot of gear has come on trucks from the airport and gone into a large sports hall," he said today. "At the moment they are just testing the gear like the inflatable boat in the harbour," he said.

Up to 120 defence staff were expected to be on the island by the end of the week.

Australian Prime Minister Mr John Howard said the Navy frigate HMAS Arunta was on its way from the west Australian city of Perth and was due to arrive at the island on Friday.

Tampa's owner Wilh Wilhelmsen said on Tuesday the ship didn't have enough provisions, medical supplies or life rafts to make an ocean voyage. Tampa captain Arne Rinnan said his vessel had enough supplies for 10 days, but was designed to accommodate only 30-40 people.

Norway said on Tuesday a team of Australian doctors had landed by helicopter on the Tampa.

Australia is struggling to stop a growing tide of asylum seekers, mainly from the Middle East, sailing from Indonesia to Australia's remote north-west coast.

# Joint crusade against Bihar child trafficking

**FROM TAPAS CHAKRABORTY**

**Katihar, July 22:** Thirteen-year-old Munni is the youngest member of a mobile theatre group that performs at fair grounds in six north Bihar districts.

Her "performance", along with other minor girls, is an euphemism for "lewd open air song-and-dance sequences". She sometimes laces her repertoire with a saucy striptease.

Munni migrated from Nepal two years ago along with co-dancer Ruma from Bangladesh. Ruma, barely 18, is an inmate of a brothel in this north Bihar town.

Munni has been moving from one district to another for the past year. "During the *mela* season in December, I take a break from business to dance. The money goes for the treatment of my father, who is suffering from tuberculosis," she told some representatives of *Bhumika*, a social organisation in Katihar.

"A nexus of brothel owners in Bangladesh, Nepal and India smuggle in these minors to Purnea, Katihar, Kishangunge and sell them in bigger cities," says Arun Singh, convener of *Bhumika*.

Surveys by a network of NGOs revealed that even toddlers are being "nurtured" for the trade at the homes of the pimps in Khabespur, Forbesgunge, Khagra and Purnea. "They address the brothel keepers as *mausis* (aunts). But they don't have mothers. Most of them have lost their mothers at birth," says a social worker.

Cross-border trafficking of minors and their exploitation have become a major source of concern for governments of the three countries.

A study conducted by the Central Social Welfare Board in six metropolitan cities, revealed that

15 per cent of the sex workers in the country are children below the age of 15 and 25 per cent below the age of 18.

Surveys cite that there are 2 lakh Nepali and at least one lakh Bangladeshi minors involved in the flesh trade and related professions. The trafficking points of these minors are along the porous Indo-Bangladesh, Indo-Nepal borders in Bihar.

There are 25 brothels in north Bihar's districts bordering Bangladesh and Nepal. Initially the girls land in these brothels before being relocated to bigger cities.

Social activists from Nepal, Bangladesh and India are planning to launch a crusade against cross-border child trafficking and their sexual exploitation. Over 150 non-government organisations from these three countries have formed the "Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC)" which will meet for the first time in Cuttack on July 28-29.

The meet plans to evolve a strategy for the ATSEC to combat the menace.

The organisation is backed by the international aid agencies like the Unicef, Action Aid and the *Terre des Home*.

A study commissioned by the Unicef, says, "India is a country of transit and destination. There is a considerable degree of internal trafficking as also some trafficking from India to the Gulf countries. Intervention programmes in UP, West Bengal and Bihar should include cross-border components as well with Nepal and Bangladesh."

The network of NGOs had gathered testimonies from minor girls pleading for rescue and rehabilitation. But after they went back to the brothel for follow-up action, the girls were not available.

# US report indicts India of human trafficking

DESIKAN THIRUNARAYANAPURAM  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON, July 13. A new US state department report on human trafficking classifies India as not fully meeting minimum standards to prevent internal trafficking of women and children, but adds it's making efforts to fight the problem.

The "Trafficking in Persons Report" released on Thursday by the secretary of state, Mr Colin Powell, says backlogged courts and corruption in India further add to the problem by delaying prosecutorial efforts against those involved in human trafficking.

The report, mandated by a law enacted last year, offers the option to apply sanctions to countries that are not, in the US government's opinion, making sufficient efforts to fight the slave trade. The sanctions provisions will take effect in 2003.

The report divided countries into three categories: countries in the first tier comply fully with the standards laid out in the Act; countries in the second tier don't fully comply but are making significant efforts to comply; and those in the third don't comply and are not making significant efforts to do so.

India ranked in the second tier, along with Bangladesh, Nepal, China and Sri Lanka. Pakistan is in the third tier.

Among the worst offenders were some of the USA's closest allies, including Saudi Arabia, Greece, South Korea and Israel.

"India is a source, transit and destination country for trafficked persons. Internal trafficking of Indian women and children is widespread. India is a destination country for Nepali and Bangladeshi women and girls for forced labour and prostitution," the report says.

However, the report also commends the government for making "significant efforts" to fight the problem, including the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act that prohibits trafficking in human beings, and provides enhanced penalties for offences involving minors.

"The Central government recognizes the trafficking problem, but is severely underfunded and typically unable to implement plans and initiatives with which it agrees."

THE STATESMAN

# Child trafficking racket busted

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI/COOCH BEHAR, May 22. - Cooch Behar police have busted an international gang of child traffickers and rescued two Bangladeshi children and arrested four persons.

The gang used to kidnap children from Bangladesh and remote Indian villages and send them to Dubai, the Cooch Behar SP, Mr KC Meena, said. From Dubai, the children were sold off to other Arab countries, where they were used in camel races.

Majidul Haque (35), the kingpin of the racket, was arrested from Dakshin Singimari village, and his accomplices, Upendranath Sarkar (60) and his son, Nayan Sarkar (17), from Pirpal village, Mr Meena said. Both villages, in the Sitai area, are close to the Bangladesh border.

The fourth member of the gang, Nakul Das, was arrested from Bhaktinagar in Jalpaiguri district.

The children rescued from the traffickers are Akhtar Mian (4 1/2) Mrinal Sarkar (5).

## KOLKATA-BOUND BUS LOOTED

MALDA, May 22. - Six dacoits looted a Hili-Kolkata bus last night. They boarded the bus coming from South Dinajpur at Balurghat and got down at Harirampur after robbing seven Bangladeshi nationals of \$900 and other passengers of Rs 10,000. Police suspect the Bangladeshi nationals were the gang's primary target. Passengers lodged a complaint with Malda police at Gazole, who in turn referred the case to Harirampur police. - SNS

The criminals had left them at a secluded place, away from their area of operation to escape the police heat. They were kidnaped from Dola village in the Trishal area of Mymensingh district of Bangladesh.

This is just the tip of the iceberg, Mr Meena said, and the arrests have revealed that the gang operated between Bangladesh and Nepal with stop-overs at Cooch Behar

and Siliguri. Majidul Haque was the link between child-snatchers in Bangladesh and India.

Once the children were smuggled out of Bangladesh, Upendranath Sarkar and his son, Nayan, used to "hide" them till a "prospective customer" was found. After that, the children used to be handed over to Nakul Das, the gang's contact man in Siliguri, who then used to smuggle them to Kathmandu. From the Nepal capital they used to be flown to Dubai.

"The gang members have admitted to having smuggled 22 boys, all under the age of 10, via this route, to Dubai where they were sold to Sheikhs for hefty sums," Mr Meena said.

The smugglers used to smuggle only healthy children so that they could be used in camel races in Arab countries.

Cooch Behar police have alerted their counterpart in Darjeeling district and sought help from Nepal police. The BSF has been asked to take up the matter with Bangladesh Rifles.

THE STATESMAN

23 MAY 2001

the one thing that is simply not available to those who most passionately desire it. This coveted though prohibited commodity is, of course, the Western way of life, with its glamour, its affluence, its devotion to humanity, freedom and choice. The emblems of the transnationals that embody this millennial vision dominate the night skies of the world's cities with their colourful logos; its values cry out to the people of the world from the newspapers of information conglomerates (many of which are now little more than propaganda sheets for fame, money and stardom of Western celebrities). Western consumerism is celebrated in

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the lengthening commercial breaks of TV stations; indeed, mere programmes increasingly appear as irritants in a seamless diffusion of continuous publicity. But the vast majority of the people of the world find their way barred to this highly advertised paradise. The question arises, why spend so much time and money laying out the treasures of the West before the hungry multitudes of the world, if access is forbidden? Is there not something perverse – not to say profoundly dishonest and against all the rules of advertising – to promote objects of consumption which simply cannot be found in the market?

The only thing more astonishing than this tireless crying of the Western wares, this exalted form of global hucksterism, this bizarre marketing of unavailable goods, is that, having done so much to promote it, its corporate sales personnel should work so hard to prevent the people of the world from reaching destinations where such things actually are to be found.

The prohibition on the movement of peoples towards this garden of earthly delights remains the most puzzling aspect of the whole story. The relentless, one-note promotion of a way of life, tantalisingly just out of reach of the open arms of the despairing of the earth, continues its perpetual self-celebration.

It is clear that this is all not intended to act as a magnet for the deprived and outcast of the earth. It serves a quite different purpose. It offers a promise of liberation. But it is only a promise, to which certain stringent conditions are attached.

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instruction in how to emulate them, how to follow the agreeable path of increasing prosperity and freedom. George W Bush made this clear in February: in his desire to "promote peace through a distinctly American internationalism."

He observed in his speech to the Congress in February that "freedom is exported every day as we ship products round the world that improve people's lives." Here is the secret: the shipping of products will do the trick. The people must not go to the products, the products will be brought to the people. Hence the outrage, anger and vehemence of the public response towards those who try to evade this benign plan for the improvement of humanity, the hostility directed against those termed economic migrants, or refugees, or even seekers of asylum.

The newspapers are full of those waiting at the frontiers of *El Dorado*, in Tangier, at Calais, in holding camps, detention centres all over Europe. A dramatic illustration of this was seen in the coverage of the recent trial in Britain of Perry Wacker, the Dutch lorry driver, who delivered to Dover last June a cargo of 60 Chinese migrants from a Fujian province in southern China, 58 of whom had died of asphyxiation by the time the container was opened up by Customs officials. All official interpretations of this were at pains to lay the blame upon the individual involved. There was no sense in any of the press or media that the constant goading of the poor by the flaunted Western lifestyle was in any way culpable. This remained, as always, untainted and unassailable, though it is as much part of the real story as the "criminals" the shadowy "snakeheads", who profit by the gullibility and hopes of the poor for a better life, who exploit their innocence and extort vast sums of money for false promises of a safe passage to the unpromised land of the good life. Thus, the villainous Wacker, who callously closed the air vent on the container in which the Chinese migrants were concealed, though he stood to earn £30,000 from their safe delivery to the UK.

It was reported that after this murderous act, he calmly ate "roast lamb and rice with shrimp salad", and watched videos on the ferry close to where people were gasping for air and clawing in vain at the suffocating metal of the airless container. "Evil trucker...killed 58...he'll serve only 44 days fore each one" said the *Sun*.

He is said to have laughed as Customs officers found body after body. The judge said to Wacker, "Each of the dead were individuals who relied on you but you treated them as cargo."

The judge condemned the "cynical exploitation" of criminal organisations involved in smuggling economic migrants for profit. He condemned the traffic in illegal entrants out of greed. The smug-



**Philadelphia City Councilman James F. Kinney at a press conference on Thursday released details of his plans to offset population loss in the suburbs by attracting immigrants to Philadelphia. He believes an influx of immigrants could help the city and the region. A Cambodian immigration officer (below) watches Cambodian workers who returned from Indonesia, at Phnom Penh airport on Friday. The 76 workers were trafficked to Thailand with promises of well-paid work, but ended up on Thai fishing trawlers working in Indonesian waters. — AP/PTI**



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Euro 2000 soccer tournament, British fans sought to lay waste the elegant European cities in which the games were played.

The paper reported from the village in China from where most of the would-be migrants came that "the incentive to make it to the West and send money home is clear to the visitor. In village after village, families of illegal migrants who completed their journeys live in gaudy mansions towering over the huts of neighbours."

The migrants had paid snakeheads the equivalent of £20,000 – the equivalent of ten years wages according to *The Guardian* to get to the UK.

Of one migrant, the paper writes, "When he left his head was full of dreams of western prosperity, both for himself and his parents." *The Guardian* said, "The ruthlessness of such gangs knows no limits."

The estimated turnover for illegal gangs in the trade in human beings is between £8 billion and £20 billion a year. Labour shortages in Europe now make it necessary for a more liberal immigration policy here. Skills shortages makes such a debate necessary, although says *The Guardian* piously, "We must not rob the Third World of skilled labour – social workers, teachers, nurses and doctors."

Nor did *The Guardian* mention the even more imperative need to combat wage inflation by the import of fresh labour: the supremacy of the economy over humanity is the real message in even the most liberal formulation of what is and is not thinkable. The villains are denounced. They will serve their prison terms. Their punishment can never be adequate to their heinous crime.

There is no whiff of scandal in the official system, only individual miscreants and wrongdoers are to blame. The remorseless propaganda of the West is not called into question, any more than is a globalisation which has disturbed, uprooted millions of people, driven them out of their traditional lands, out of self-reliance, out of their occupations, out of their minds.

Nor is there mention in the public indignation of the trafficking in human beings that such trade is at the very core of the great project of globalisation, of which this illicit and doomed episode is only one small illustration.

Anyone travelling through south Asia soon becomes aware of crowds of young men and women in the livery of some recruiting agency or other huddled together, terrified, at airports, at railway stations and bus terminals. Young men in identical uniforms bearing the name of this construction company, that

cleaning outfit, some other enterprise of organised servitude, wait to be transported to sweatshops or city streets, factories or construction sites in distant parts of the world. Women travel to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain for domestic

Hands are sent in selected locations around the globe; what a pity that people have to be attached to them. At every turn, the abstraction of labour, the commodification, of humanity is at the heart of the global system.

Even in the places of privilege, people are required as consumers, clients, punters, purchasers, customers; their humanity comes a distant second to their economic function. The point about the episode that yielded its cargo of dead workers – whose death cancelled the moral repugnancy of their illegality – to Dover last year is how slight a departure this was from the norm; how close to what is regarded as an

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unexceptional and commonplace transaction. And since in the global transport (or traffic) of people, accidents, disasters and negligence account for the deaths of thousands of workers worldwide each year – for which no one is considered culpable – the anger expended over the traffickers and traders in misery in this instance has another motive than grief over their fate: namely, to distance the powerful beneficiaries of the global system of the trade and traffic in people from the actions of those who imitate them so closely but so improperly.

It is sobering to observe that incidents which rouse the greatest anger in the West are always those which come uncomfortably close to, and therefore have the potential to illuminate, the true nature of what is regarded as legitimate business. This case placed on conspicuous show both the constant and disturbing projection of a sterile, one-sided version of the Western way of life across the globe, and the pressing into its service of millions of trafficked and degraded human beings.

All the considerable resources of moral outrage and blame must be heaped upon those who are "guilty", not so much of killing a boatload of illegal migrants, but of betraying the true nature of a global system to a world which is supposed to see only its humane and civilising nature, its eager desire to promote the wellbeing of the people whose bodies, the human waste of globalisation, it nevertheless washes up on distant shores they were never intended to reach.

*(The author lives in Britain. He has written plays for stage, television and radio, made TV documentaries, published more than 30 books and contributes to leading journals around the world.)*



# Migrants in unpromised land

IT IS a strange and bitter irony that the object of the most intensive global promotion by the public relations and advertising agencies of the world is the one thing that is simply not available to those who most passionately desire it. This coveted though prohibited commodity is, of course, the Western way of life, with its glamour, its affluence, its devotion to humanity, freedom and choice. The emblems of the transnationals that embody this millennial vision dominate the night skies of the world's cities with their colourful logos; its values cry out to the people of the world from the newspapers of information conglomerates (many of which are now little more than propaganda sheets for fame, money and stardom of Western celebrities). Western consumerism is celebrated in

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The poor may not seek it in distant lands where it already exists, but must create it at home, where they are destined to remain.

It has something of the aspect of a mirage: the West is not going to share its prodigious wealth with the rest of the world, but they are going to offer instruction in how to emulate them, how to follow the agreeable path of increasing prosperity and freedom. George W Bush made this clear in February: in his desire to "promote peace through a distinctly American internationalism."

He observed in his speech to the Congress in February that "freedom is exported every day as we ship products round the world that improve people's lives." Here is the secret: the shipping of products will do the trick. The people must not go to the products, the products will be brought to the people. Hence the outrage, anger and vehemence of the public response towards those who try to evade this benign plan for the improvement of humanity, the hostility directed against those termed economic migrants, or refugees, or even seekers of asylum.

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gling plot was master-minded by mobsters in China called Snakeheads. The Snakeheads handed over their human cargo to a smuggling gang headed by Turks in Rotterdam, according to *The Daily Telegraph*. This gang has been

under surveillance by police, but the operation was called off because the police had to be diverted to the control of the Euro 2000 soccer tournament, in which British fans sought to lay waste the elegant European cities in which the games were played.

The paper reported from the village in China from where most of the would-be migrants came that "the incentive to make it to the West and send money home is clear to the visitor. In village after village, families of illegal migrants who completed their journeys live in gaudy mansions towering over the huts of neighbours."

The migrants had paid snakeheads the equivalent of £20,000 – the equivalent of ten years wages according to *The Guardian* to get to the UK.

Of one migrant, the paper writes, "When he left his head was full of dreams, of western prosperity, both for himself and his parents." *The Guardian* said, "The ruthlessness of such gangs knows no limits."

The estimated turnover for illegal gangs in the trade in human beings is between £8 billion and £20 billion a year. Labour shortages in Europe now make it necessary for a more liberal immigration policy here. Skills shortages makes such a debate necessary, although says *The Guardian* piously, "We must not rob the Third World of skilled labour – social workers, teachers, nurses and doctors."

Nor did *The Guardian* mention the even more imperative need to combat wage inflation by the import of fresh labour: the supremacy of the economy over humanity is the real message in even the most liberal formulation of what is and is not thinkable. The villains are denounced. They will serve their prison terms. Their punishment can never be adequate to their heinous crime.

There is no whiff of scandal in the official system, only individual miscreants and wrongdoers are to blame. The remorseless propaganda of the West is not called into question, any more than is a globalisation which has disturbed, uprooted millions of

people, driven them out of their traditional lands, out of self-reliance, out of their occupations, out of their minds.

Nor is there mention in the public indignation of the trafficking in human beings that such trade is at the very core of the great project of globalisation, of which this illicit and doomed episode is only one small illustration. Anyone travelling through south Asia soon becomes aware of crowds of young men and women in the livery of some recruiting agency or other huddled together, terrified, at airports, at railway stations and bus terminals. Young men in identical uniforms bearing the name of this construction company, that

cleaning outfit, some other enterprise of organised servitude, wait to be transported to sweatshops or city streets, factories or construction sites in distant parts of the world. Women travel to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain for domestic

service; they are traded from Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand to Japan, Europe and Australia for the sex industry.

Hands are wanted in selected locations around the globe; what a pity that people have to be attached to them. At every turn, the abstraction of labour, the commodification, of humanity is at the heart of the global system.

Even in the places of privilege, people are required as consumers, clients, punters, purchasers, customers; their humanity comes a distant second to their economic function. The point about the episode that yielded its cargo of dead workers – whose death cancelled the moral repugnancy of their illegality – to Dover last year is how slight a departure this was from the norm; how close to what is regarded as an

**And since in the global transport (or traffic) of people, accidents, disasters and negligence account for the deaths of thousands of workers worldwide each year – for which no one is considered culpable – the anger expended over the traffickers ...**

unexceptional and commonplace transaction. And since in the global transport (or traffic) of people, accidents, disasters and negligence account for the deaths of thousands of workers worldwide each year – for which no one is considered culpable – the anger expended over the traffickers and traders in misery in this instance has another motive than grief over their fate: namely, to distance the powerful beneficiaries of the global system of the trade and traffic in people from the actions of those who imitate them so closely but so improperly.

It is sobering to observe that incidents which rouse the greatest anger in the West are always those which come uncomfortably close to, and therefore have the potential to illuminate, the true nature of what is regarded as legitimate business. This case placed on conspicuous show both the constant and disturbing projection of a sterile, one-sided version of the Western way of life across the globe, and the pressing into its service of millions of trafficked and degraded human beings.

All the considerable resources of moral outrage and blame must be heaped upon those who are "guilty", not so much of killing a boatload of illegal migrants, but of betraying the true nature of a global system to a world which is supposed to see only its humane and civilising nature, its eager desire to promote the wellbeing of the people whose bodies, the human waste of globalisation, it nevertheless washes up on distant shores they were never intended to reach.

(The author lives in Britain. He has written plays for stage, television and radio, made TV documentaries, published more than 30 books and contributes to leading journals around the world.)

## Anita aide says she is being framed

HYDERABAD, May 17. — Saritha, associate of prime accused Anita Sen, said she was being framed in the adoption racket. Saritha was arrested from a hospital in Somajiguda this morning after her husband informed the police that she was admitted there.

"I am only an employee. I am accused but not guilty" Saritha said. She was interrogated by Crime Investigation Department sleuths and would be produced in court tomorrow.

Asked if Anita had deserted her, Saritha nodded in the affirmative and broke down. She said she was being framed in the racket. She said she had delayed surrendering to the authorities due to illness. She was staying with her husband in Mumbai. She last met Anita on 27 April and did not have information on her whereabouts.

On her association with the fake adoption home, Precious Moments, Saritha said she was a Doctorate in Plant Pathology from the Osmania University and was only helping Anita in her work. The CID has given Anita's husband, additional JGP, Mr Swaranjit Sen and her two sons time till Friday to appear before them for examination. — SNS

THE STATESMAN

12 MAY 2001

# 20-yr hard labour for Indo-Bangla child smuggling

BY DILIP GANGULY

**Dhaka, May 8:** A judge has sentenced a man and a woman to 20 years of hard labour for trying to smuggle five teen-age Bangladeshi girls to India where they may have ended up in brothels, court officials said on Tuesday.

The landmark judgment, which gave the maximum penalty under law, may have an impact on trafficking of Bangladeshi women into India, an issue that has been raised at the United Nations.

Ms Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Sri Lanka-based coordinator of the UN human rights commission on violence against women, said in March that in Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries in the world, 10,000-15,000 girls and women are trafficked across the border to India per year. The traffickers, who use the 4,096.70 km unfenced border, are rarely arrested and punished. Judge Mohammed Sirajul Islam's sentence, issued May 5 in Satkhira, 175 km east of Dhaka, the capital, was unusual.

Those convicted and given the maxi-

mum sentence were Minhajul Islam, 40, and Haziran Bibi, 23, said court clerk Mohammed Nurul Islam. Islam is a common surname in Bangladesh and does not indicate that the judge, clerk and defendant are related.

Acting on a tip, border guards raided Minhajul Islam's home in January and found five girls waiting to be smuggled into India through the border with West Bengal. Islam, Bibi and seven others were tried by a special border crimes tribunal. The judge released the other seven defendants for lack of evidence.

Ms Coomaraswamy, in her 43-page report on the situation of women and children in Bangladesh, Nepal and India, said that traffickers use deception, fraud, intimidation, drugs and violence to take vulnerable women and children across borders. They work alone, in small gangs or as part of an organised crime syndicate, the March report says. Many women, desperate to escape discrimination and poverty in their home countries, often cooperate, at least initially, said Ms Coomaraswamy.

International agencies figure 100,000 to

200,000 women from Nepal are engaged in forced prostitution in northern and central India and increasingly farther afield in south Asia and the West Asia, she had said. Ms Coomaraswamy believes that while the justice system needs to increase efforts to prevent, prosecute and punish traffickers, providing women with opportunities for financial independence is more crucial. The Indian Association for the Rescue of Fallen Women, a NGO, estimated that in 1992 there were 8 million brothel workers in India. (AP)

THE ASIAN AGE

9 MAY 2001

# BJP irked by US observations

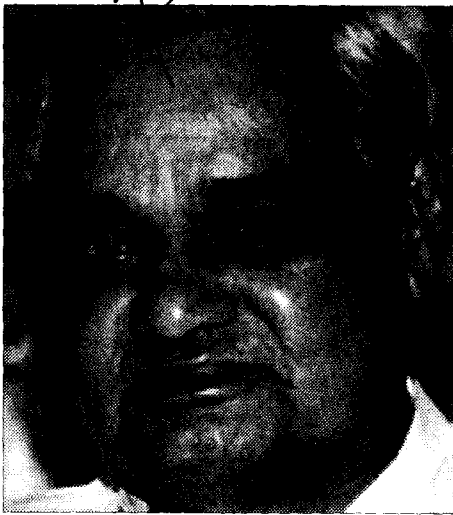
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 1. - The BJP today strongly objected to the US commission's attempt to link lifting of the US economic sanctions against India to the poor status of minorities, saying the two were different issues.

The party also disagreed with the observations of the commission about the status of minorities in the country and said this was yet another attempt to malign India and the present government. They (such human rights commissions) want "this government to go," the senior BJP leader, Mr JP Mathur, told The Statesman.

India should not even take cognizance of such "biased reports", he asserted, and pointed out that the minorities were totally safe and enjoyed equal rights and security. In certain cases, they enjoyed more rights than members of the majority community, he said.

These self-proclaimed human rights authorities had their own agenda against In-



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee

dia and they conveniently forgot that minorities in other countries like Pakistan did not even have the basic amenities, he

said. Instead of working to get Pakistan declared a rogue state, these organisations were trying to single out India on an issue which was non-existent, he added.

The reports that Christians were being harassed and attacked were also incorrect. In 80 per cent of such cases, it was found that small local incidents were blown out of proportion.

In many cases Christians themselves were involved like the rape case in Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, the BJP leader said.

He also refuted the allegation that violence against minorities had increased after the increase of political influence of the BJP and the like at the national and state levels.

The track record of the present government at the Centre and BJP-ruled states and the record of the previous BJP governments contradicted the baseless charge, he said.

There was no communal disturbance in these areas, he asserted.

THE STATESMAN

- 2 MAY 2001

# Adoption racket busted, 34 infants rescued

**Our Special Correspondent** HYDERABAD, APRIL 22. The alleged trafficking of children from Lambada (Adivasi) families in Andhra Pradesh, under the guise of 'adoption', which rocked the State two years ago, has surfaced once again. Officials of the Women and Child Welfare Department today raided a Hyderabad-based NGO, Action for Social Development, and rescued 34 infants. They have been shifted to the Niloufer Hospital.

On Saturday, the Gulbarga Superintendent of Police, working on a similar racket in Karnataka, visited the John Abraham Memorial Bethany Home, an adoption centre at Tandur, in the neighbouring Ranga Reddy district, and recovered the body of an infant buried in the

Home's compound. The Karnataka police arrested Mr. Suryakumar, working in the Gulbarga branch of this Home, and are investigating. Seventeen infants from this Home have been shifted to the Niloufer Hospital by officials of the Women and Child Welfare department. The infants were sick because the *ayaths* (nannies) working here left the Home fearing police investigation. These were the two NGOs accused of indulging in child adoption without permission.

## Inquiry ordered

The Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, has ordered a CB-CID inquiry into these incidents. Mr. Naidu also asked the District Collector, Ranga Reddy district, to visit

the Tandur adoption home and submit a report on its activities. He announced the setting up a separate board to monitor all orphanages in the State and a reward of Rs. 1 lakh for those giving information about such activities by voluntary agencies. The Director of Bethany Home has been absconding for a month now.

Mr. N. Sanjeeva Rao of Action for Social Development (ASD) has denied that his organisation was selling children abroad for adoption purposes. Its licence for offering children for adoption was cancelled in 1999 by the Central Adoption Resource Agency, and ASD has challenged this in the High Court, which is pending. Mr. Rao said his organisation rescued infants abandoned by mothers immediately after delivery.

THE HINDU

23 APR 2001

23 APR 2001

# Slave chase fiasco highlights child trade racket

Cotonou (Benin), April 17

AN INTERNATIONAL hunt off the West African coast for a ship believed to be carrying hundreds of child slaves turned out to have been a wild goose chase when it docked and was found to contain only economic migrants.

But the incident did draw world attention to a very real and sordid trade in children, aid workers said on Tuesday.

When the MV Etireno docked in Cotonou, capital of Benin, authorities discovered only a couple of dozen children with their mothers instead of the expected 180 children sold by families to be plantation

workers and domestic servants. "We are still confused. We don't know where the confusion arose. There were not as many children on board as we had thought," said Nicolas Pron of the UN Children's Agency, UNICEF, in Cotonou.

"We are pleased that the world is turning its attention to this issue. If there were not child slaves on that boat there are other boats trafficking children."

The agency estimates that at least 200,000 children are trafficked in the region each year.

Pron insisted that the Etireno was the boat that had been sought in the belief it carried slaves. The Benin Government

had earlier suggested a mixup with another Nigerian boat possibly off Equatorial Guinea and possibly carrying Nigerian children.

Benin's social protection minister, Ramatou Baba Moussa, said there were 139 passengers on board, including seven children. Witnesses counted a couple of dozen children on board, all of whom appeared to be accompanied. "There was a situation and we had to take action. The affair is over. I don't deny that Benin is part of the traffic in children and the Government will do all it can to beat it," she said.

No move was made to arrest or question any of the ship's crew.

There was no sign of the Benin businessman Stanislas Abadtan or at least two other people against whom international arrest warrants were issued in connection with the trade.

Despite international efforts to curb the trade, child slavery persists in West and Central Africa, from where slave traders shipped millions of people to the Americas from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

The region near modern-day Benin and Togo was once a center of that trade and was known as the "Slave Coast."

Most of the boat's occupants did not look to be in poor health after a 2,000 km journey. The ship

left Cotonou on March 30 for Libreville in Gabon, but was turned back by authorities there.

Many passengers recounted how the ship was turned away, not because it had child slaves aboard but because it was carrying illegal immigrants seeking relative riches in an impoverished region.

"When we got to Libreville some people tried to go ashore in small boats, but when they reached the beach they were attacked by robbers. When the robbers found they (the passengers) had no money, they called the police.

"Because they had no papers, the police put them all back on

board the boat and said it had to leave," said Mamadou Fall, a Senegalese businessman among the passengers.

First reports had put the number of children on board the ship at 250. Many child slaves from countries such as Benin, Togo and Mali end up working on plantations producing cocoa and other cash crops in Gabon and Ivory Coast. Others work as domestic servants. Some girls are forced into prostitution.

Anti-child labor campaigners say the youngsters are often forced to work for up to 12 hours a day and are sometimes subjected to physical abuse.

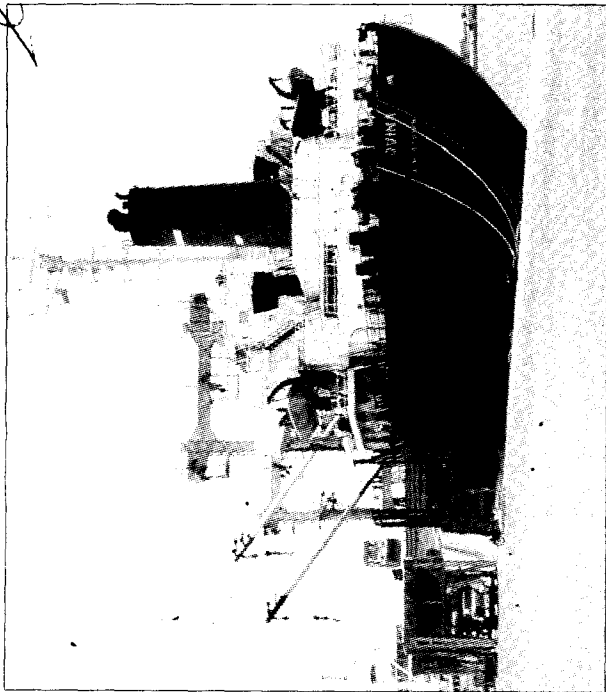
Reuters

1874 Human trafficking

NY-11

THE HUMANITARIAN  
18 APR 2001

# Global appeal to save slave children



Cotonou, April 16

HT-11

BENIN APPEALED on Monday for help from the United Nations and Western powers in the search for a missing cargo vessel suspected of carrying child slaves off the coast of West Africa.

Benin police said an international arrest warrant had been issued for a businessman suspected of trading scores of child slaves thought to be on a ship roaming the West African coast.

"Interpol international arrest warrants have been issued for Stanislas Abaditan and two others," said one Benin police source. "The search is particularly in Gabon and Nigeria."

Port officials said the vessel, which had been expected to dock in Cotonou on Sunday after being turned back from Gabon and Cameroon was not responding to calls and had not tried to make contact with Benin's authorities.

"There is absolutely no latest information, which is the most worrying thing," said Estelle Guluman of the United

Nations Children's Fund in Cotonou. "The next stage I think is to try and put some pressure on the international community to try and assist in detecting it."

The aging and decrepit Nigerian-registered vessel, MV Etrino, was refused entry at two African ports over the past week after apparently leaving Benin's capital of Cotonou some 10 days ago. It is believed to be carrying 100-250 impoverished children intended for sale as unpaid domestic and plantation workers.

The ship was originally turned away from Gabon, a relatively prosperous country to the southeast where authorities believe those behind the operation were planning to sell the children. On Thursday, it was also refused port in Douala, Cameroon, according to UN and Benin officials.

Benin Social Protection Minister Ramatou Baba Moussa said port authorities believe the suspected slave ship is "not far" from Benin's capital, yet the country does not have big enough naval boats to intercept it. Benin has only about five

small patrol boats, often in poor repair, Benin officials said.

"We need top technology, we need satellites and fast ships to help us," Moussa said. "We have talked to the United Nations and will be calling the ambassadors of United States and France to ask them to launch a search."

Benin has issued arrest warrants for the ship's Nigerian owner, captain and crew as well as three Beninois businessmen. The businessmen, led by Stanislas Abatan, are accused of organizing and profiting from the illegal human trade, police said on Sunday. Abatan was believed to be living in Gabon while the other two were in Benin's capital.

Nicolas Pron, a senior UN children's agency official in Benin, said the organization was "really very frustrated" and increasingly worried about the safety of the children. Because of the length of time the ship had been at sea, it was "doubtful" the passengers had enough food or water, Pron said.

Unicef also worried that the ship's cap-

tain — a man with a criminal record in Nigeria who has been accused of trafficking child slaves in the past — could dump his human cargo. "When we heard (the captain) has a criminal past, we imagined the worst, and the worst is that they could have been thrown overboard," Pron said.

There are several major ports in neighboring Nigeria where the ship may have docked, avoiding detection by bribing port officials. Nigeria is one of the world's most corrupt nations and regulation enforcement is often lax.

UN officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the international body did not have resources on hand to conduct a search. They said such an action would have to be spearheaded by member nations in any case. It was not immediately apparent if Western nations were aiding the search effort. France, Benin's former colonial ruler, has a naval vessel stationed off West Africa almost permanently. British warships also regularly visit the war-battered nation of Sierra Leone.

Agency