**SKILLS FOR FREEDOM**

**Newsletter from India**

**No: 5 September: 2015**

This electronic newsletter from **PEACE TRUST, INDIA** is addressed to NGO's, Social Activists, Media, Opinion makers, Leaders and Bureaucrats for improving their understanding on skilling the youth for gainful employment and addressing social issues like modern slavery, child labour, migrant labour, un-employability of youth. We also send this to people who we believe are involved in improving the migrant worker's conditions. You are welcome to unsubscribe yourself, if you so choose.

**-EDITOR**

Peace Trust is a Non Government Organization working on Child Labour and Bonded Labour issues since 1984. It has also focused on Migrant workers rights issue since 1999.

* Peace Trust’s Skills for Freedom is the only solution to end Modern Slavery in Tamil Nadu. It is a joint effort for enhancing the employment opportunities of rural youth in Dindigul, Karur, Tiruppur Districts.
* Reduce the risk for young workers - Beginning of this month Peace Trust has launched a new Initiative to "Support School Education, Health Protection, Livelihood Development and Skill Training for Gainful Employment among Vulnerable Young Population in Dindigul District" Geneva Global/ Freedom Fund are supporting this initiative
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* Peace Trust also provides training for Quality Teacher Education and gainful employment to young women from resource poor families in Dindigul and Karur District.

The views expressed are not of the donors but a compilation of field realities for the purpose of sharing and action.

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# MIGRANT WORKERS

# KERALA’S DREAM-CHASERS LEAVE THEIR PARENTS LONELY

August 4, 2015

Kerala’s money-order economy, thriving on more than Rs. one lakh crore of foreign remittances from 2.5 million emigrants, is leaving a colossal social footprint in the form of exclusion of a huge number of the elderly in the State.

About six per cent of the nearly three million elderly in Kerala lead lonely lives for various reasons, but mostly because their sons and daughters have migrated abroad, says a study on migration-induced exclusion of the elderly by the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, Cochin University of Science and Technology.

**Situation grim**

The situation is grimmer in the urban areas where the percentage of the lonely elders is 11.

The study revealed that the problem of lonely elders was more acute in central and southern Kerala while, while north Kerala, with its relatively more surviving vestiges of the joint family system, provided more comfort and emotional security to their elderly. While 27 per cent of the lonely elderly people in north Kerala were interested in shifting to old-age homes, more than 43 per cent of their counterparts in south Kerala and nearly 30 per cent in central Kerala wished to do so. The numbers also underscore why 45 of the 209 old-age homes in the State are located in Ernakulam district.

Preference for old-age homes has also been linked to Gulf and non-Gulf-bound emigrations. Parents of emigrants to Europe and the United States, mostly in central Kerala, are keener to choose a life in old-age homes, said Mr. Rajasenan. Kerala's much lauded favorable sex ratio and increasing longevity means that there are more women elders in the State than men.

“Widowhood at an older age amplifies their social exclusion and deprivation”, said D. Rajasenan, who led the team of social scientists on the study. The elderly make up 10.5 per cent of Kerala’s population of roughly 3.33 crore. The national average is 8.6 per cent. Himachal Pradesh (9 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (8.8) come closest to Kerala in terms of their elderly population as percentage of the total.

**Set to rise**

The number of elderly people in the State is set to rise to 6.6 million by 2021 and to 11.17 million by 2051.

Lack of policy interventions and institutions for the elderly magnify the issue, the study said, pointing out that there are now 1,62,000 elderly persons in the State seeking shelter on charity. Kerala population is characterised by longevity of 75.5 years against the national average 65.5 years. The average life expectancy will go up to 78.6 years between 2021 and 2025 while that of India will be 72.3 years.

**Realistic solution**

However, the lack of policy initiatives is glaring though old-age homes may still be a realistic solution. The government has been popularising the concept in the wake of the rise of nuclear families. “The problem of the State’s more than three million elderly is still not recognized as a serious social issue. This needs urgent attention,” the study said.

**MIGRANTS FROM TURKEY FLOOD INTO GREECE; SCUFFLES ON BOAT**

Migrants on a Turkish beach scuffled over places on one inflatable dinghy and frantically bailed out another to keep it from sinking during a dramatic night that highlighted their desperation to reach the Greek island of Kos and the safety of Europe.

The scenes of human trafficking, captured early Saturday by Associated Press journalists on a moonless night, came as Turkish authorities reported that 2,791 migrants have been caught in the Aegean Sea in the past 5 days alone, most of them Syrians.

Overall, more than 33,000 migrants have been caught or rescued in the Aegean this year, according to the governor’s office in Izmir. Kos is only 4 km from Turkey at its closest point, its twinkling lights at night an irresistible beacon to those fleeing war or poverty.

Tensions were high early Saturday at Fenerburnu Beach near the Turkish tourist town of Bodrum. Two migrants tried to clamber onto a small dinghy only to be forced off by angry fellow passengers, one of whom shouted- “You haven’t paid!” One passenger was also upset that the male intruders had touched the arm of a female migrant wearing an Islamic headscarf.

The two ejected migrants fled up the beach and into the bushes just as a Turkish military police vehicle, its siren wailing, approached. Earlier, in the darkness well away from the shore, two migrant smuggling boats appeared to be intercepted by another vessel and their passengers taken into custody. It was not immediately clear if Greek authorities were once again intercepting migrants at sea. Later in the night, another inflatable dinghy setting off from the beach appeared close to sinking under the weight of its human cargo, which included at least one of the men forced off the earlier vessel. Three women jumped out and ran away shouting “No, no, no!” clearly terrified at the prospect of making even the short crossing to Kos in the flimsy boat.

Their panic spread to other passengers, leaving just four men to bail out the water using only plastic paddles. Then, using a tiny electric motor, they steered the boat toward the lights of Kos. As the dinghy gathered speed, three men who had earlier abandoned ship waded through the warm water to clamber back on board.

Asked if they had anything to say as they faded into the night, one man replied- “May God help us.” Issa Jaefer, a Syrian waiting in Bodrum to make the crossing to Kos, said the migrants are aware of the dangers. “We were left to die in Syria,” he said earlier in the week. “It doesn’t matter if we die on the rough sea. At the end, by God’s providence, we will reach the stability and security in Europe.” The number of migrants trying to reach Europe by sea is on track to hit a record this year, according to the Geneva-based International Organization for Migration.

Financially struggling Greece has reported 134,988 arrivals from Turkey this year, it said, while Italy recorded 93,540 newcomers through July. Along with migrants landing in Spain and Malta, 237,000 people have made the crossing so far this year, the agency says compared to 219,000 for all of 2014. It also estimated at least 2,300 people have died this year trying to make the crossing.

**3 ARRESTED FOR DEFRAUDING MIGRANT LABOURER**

The Kalamassery police on Monday arrested three persons including a West Bengal native for defrauding Rs. 1.5 lakh from a person by pretending as shadow cops.

The arrested have been identified as Samim Kabir, a native of Murshidabad in West Bengal, Karthik and Dileep Kumar, residents of Perumbavur. As per the case, the accused waylaid and appropriated the cash from Navas, a migrant labourer, on July 27. According to police, Dileep Kumar and Samim Kabir had been employed at a spices company near Perumbavur. Kabir, an account holder with the United Bank of India, used to send money of about 30 of his friends to their homes using the same account and charged a commission of Rs.25 per Rs.1000.

“Kabir and Navas were on their way to the bank at Edappally to send the money through Kabir’s account, when Dileep and Karthik waylaid them at an isolated location on the NAD Road and introduced themselves as members of the shadow police wing. They also searched Navas’s bag and on finding cash, threatened to book them for holding black money. The duo was released after taking away the cash’’, officials said.

Even as Navas planned to approach the police, Kabir insisted on not filing a complaint, which in turn, raised suspicion about his role in the episode. A few days later, Navas approached the police separately and investigations revealed that the entire episode had been planned by Kabir along with the other accused. The police are on the lookout for one more person, Rajiv, in this connection.

**THOUSANDS OF MIGRANTS HEAD CLOSER TO THE EU**

Thousands of beleaguered migrants mostly Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans fleeing bloody conflicts crammed into trains and buses in Macedonia that brought them one step closer to the European Union on Sunday, a day after they stormed past police trying to block them from entering the country from Greece.

On Saturday, some 2,000 rain-soaked migrants rushed past baton-wielding Macedonian officers, who had been sealing the border for three days. Police fired stun grenades and dozens of people were injured as the migrants leapt over barbed wire or ran across a field not protected by the fence to enter Macedonia.

On Sunday, the migrants many with children and babies orderly boarded trains and buses that took them to the border with Serbia before heading farther north toward E.U.-member Hungary, which is building a razor wire fence on its frontier to prevent them from entering. If they manage to enter Hungary, the migrants could travel freely across the borders of most of the 28 EU-member states.

The more than 5,000 migrants who reached Serbia overnight faced an overcrowded refugee center where they have to apply for asylum the paper that allows them three days to reach Hungary.

State Serbian TV said that a woman gave birth overnight inside the center and that many people are sick and injured from Saturday’s clashes.

**AS GERMANY WELCOMES MIGRANTS, SOME WONDER HOW TO MAKE ACCEPTANCE LAST**

By MELISSA EDDYSEPT. 5, 2015

BERLIN — As tens of thousands of asylum seekers now pour into Germany, their desired destination, they will be met here by bowls of steaming soup and bread rolls, working bathrooms and an efficient bureaucracy to move them to temporary housing and, possibly, legal immigration status.

The arrival in August of more than 104,400 people seeking asylum has strained resources and challenged authorities from Bavaria to Berlin. Yet such logistical problems are manageable for the Germans, who pride themselves on the country’s order and adherence to established rules.

But the long-term integration of a group of people expected to reach 1 percent of the overall population, most of whom practice a different religion and often hold profoundly different world views, is another question altogether.

While the prospect of accepting an expected 800,000 new residents this year offers Germany an opportunity to rejuvenate its aging demographics and ensure its economic prosperity, it also challenges a prevailing cultural consensus of what it means to be German.

“The refugees are synonymous with formidable change,” Thomas de Maizière, Germany’s interior minister, said recently in an interview with the German weekly Die Zeit. “We must get used to the thought that our country is changing.”

That change is at the doorstep. When thousands of migrants were allowed to leave Hungary late Friday and were put on buses to the Austrian border, many were brandishing posters of Chancellor Angela Merkel. In their days of near internment in the inhospitable Hungarian capital, some of the exhausted and desperate travelers broke into chants of “Germany, Germany” and “Merkel, Merkel,” demanding to be allowed to continue their journey west.

Germans have met previous waves — and a steady tide — of these newcomers with an outpouring of generosity and support. Thousands of volunteers have shown up in camps to feed the migrants. Others have delivered water and fruit to refugees to ease their long, hot waits as they register their arrival. And some Germans have even risked arrest to circumvent the immigration bureaucracy and shelter some of the most vulnerable in their churches.

Munich police overseeing the arrival on Monday of trains from Budapest, packed with some 1,300 migrants, were so overwhelmed with public donations that they had to cut off the flow by the next afternoon. As the city prepared for the latest wave on Saturday, those volunteers were incorporated into the authorities’ official response plans.

But some fear the outpouring of generosity will not last. The Social Ministry expects the German government to spend 1.8 billion to 3.3 billion euros, about $2 billion to $3.7 billion, in 2016 to cover the refugees’ basic needs, language lessons and job training. As those costs mount, so might resentment.

Already Germany has experienced a formidable backlash against the migrants — the worst in Europe. Although the country does not have an influential far-right political party, such as France’s National Front or the Freedom Party of Austria, smaller neo-Nazi and right-wing groups have seized on the issue, organizing demonstrations outside homes for asylum seekers. In the first six months of this year, there were more than 200 arson and other attacks on facilities for migrants, and on migrants themselves.

“This massive immigration is increasingly seen in the growing worries of Germans,” said Ronny Zasowk of the far-right National Democratic Party, known by its German initials N.P.D. He warned that social structures would be overwhelmed and said that many of the party’s followers feared that an open-door policy could make Germany more vulnerable to Islamic extremism and terrorism.

Mr. de Maizière, whose office is responsible for coordinating the response to the newcomers, has called for more police, but also for more teachers and social workers to help with, for example, the mounds of paperwork necessary to enter into the bureaucratic system. But in the long-term, he warned, more resources will be needed to help the asylum seekers, many of whom fled chaotic and largely dysfunctional states, to adapt to a new way of life.

Among the strongest voices urging tolerance toward immigrants have been the German news media, from the mass-circulation Bild to the public television stations. Experts point to the news media’s positive stance as crucial in helping the public shift its perception of more foreigners coming to the country.

Recalling Nazi racial laws that singled out the Germanic, or Aryan, people as superior to other ethnicities, leading to the Holocaust and the atrocities of World War II, President Joachim Gauck recently urged Germans to embrace the diversity that has since grown up around them.

Until “even more people can part with the image of a nation that is very homogeneous and in which nearly all people speak German as their mother tongue, are fair-skinned and largely Christian,” he said, their perception of German society will not reflect the reality of who lives here.

“In reality, life as we live it here is already far more diverse,” Mr. Gauck said. “In our heads we know this, but the spirit sometimes lags behind. We as a nation must redefine ourselves, as a collective of different people, but who all accept common values.”

Many, including Ms. Merkel, have compared the challenge facing Germany to the historic decisions after the breach of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, when the leaders of West Germany swiftly enacted measures aimed at ensuring the peaceful merger of what for decades had been two separate states.

Even as the country prepares to mark a quarter-century of German reunification this fall, a spate of violent anti-immigrant protests in the eastern state of Saxony has led to accusations that differences between the two regions still exist, revealing just how difficult it can be even for two peoples who share a language and heritage to feel as one.

Experts also point to the former West Germany’s far less successful experiment of integration in the 1960s, when that country invited men, most of them from Turkey, to fill the industrial jobs in its post-World War II factories. But they were viewed as “guests,” who would eventually return home, not as future citizens.

“For a long time, we made the mistake of considering migrant workers ‘guest workers,’ ” Ms. Merkel recently told reporters, “an idea that we have recently come to abandon, faced with the reality they are our fellow citizens, no matter what their ancestry.”

The descendants of those “guest workers” who remained in the country now make up the nearly four million Muslims in Germany’s population of almost 82 million. But failure to address the workers’ initial needs, and later those of their families, still reverberate. Only this year did the German Parliament pass legislation that would allow children of migrants who were raised or educated in the country to adopt German citizenship, while keeping their own.

“Had we worked to integrate them from the beginning, there would be a lot fewer problems today,” said Claudia Walther, a senior project manager with the Bertelsmann Foundation in Germany who has worked on integration.

German leaders see that experience as a moment from which lawmakers can draw valuable lessons as they look ahead to a political summit meeting on Sept. 24 aimed at adopting legal and, possibly, constitutional changes to help the country adapt to the latest influx.

But the Turkish experience is apparently very much on the mind of Mr. de Maizière, who brought it up during the interview with Die Zeit and perhaps provided the starkest insight into the concerns of German leaders as they prepare to accept the thousands heading their way.

“Now we will get hundreds of thousands of Muslims more formed by Arabic background,” he told the weekly. “According to all that I am told by my French colleague that is a big difference, as far as integration is concerned.”

**AUSTRIA, GERMANY AGREE TO TAKE IN MIGRANTS FROM HUNGARY**

Melanie Eversley, USA. EDT September 4, 2015

Leaders in Austria and Germany have agreed to take in migrants from troubled Hungary who approach their border, the Austrian chancellor said.

In a statement posted to Facebook, Werner Faymann said that the agreement had been reached after communication with Austrian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, "due to today's plight at the Hungarian border."

Earlier Friday, hundreds of frustrated migrants left Budapest on foot and began walking toward the Austrian and German borders, their numbers stopping traffic on highways, Hungary Today reported. At a railway station in Bicske, about 20 miles west of Budapest, groups of migrants refused to be transported to a reception center, the news organization reported.

The migrants were passengers on a train that was stopped at Bicske, but said they preferred to go to Germany rather than a refugee camp, according to Hungary Today.

They said they were tricked into getting on the train that they thought was headed for Western Europe, where they hope to seek asylum.

The announcement from Faymann came after a day of increased tensions among refugees attempting to leave Hungary.

"Hundreds of refugees are currently on foot from Hungary to Austria," read a statement released by the Austrian interior ministry translated into English. "Police and Red Cross are prepared for the arrival of refugees. Every refugee in Austria can apply for asylum."

The statement further read, "A solution of the current situation can only be ensured in the spirit of European solidarity."

While the crisis came to a head on Friday, it has been building up for weeks.

The migrants are among hundreds of thousands fleeing war, poverty and prosecutions. Among them are Syrians running from Islamic State, Iraqis, Eritreans, Nigerians and Albanians.

**AS EUROPE GRASPS FOR ANSWERS, MORE MIGRANTS FLOOD ITS BORDERS**

**By rick lyman and alison smalesept. 6, 2015**

HEGYESHALOM, Hungary — Throughout the day on Sunday, train after packed train arrived at this border town from Budapest, the passengers smoothly shifting to a gleaming Austrian train on the opposite side of the platform and being whisked on to Vienna and beyond — 13,000 of them in the first 36 hours after Hungary allowed throngs of refugees and migrants to travel toward Germany.

But that is not the end. Thousands of migrants continue to flow through the Balkans toward Hungary every day, rapidly approaching its southern border with Serbia, government officials said. Two Greek ferries carrying more than 4,000 migrants were scheduled to land Sunday in Athens, a first stop on the migrant trail through the Balkans.

Despite cheers of welcome in Germany, and tears of relief from weary migrants, it remained unclear how Europe would deal with successive waves of migrants, which humanitarian groups have assured are on the way, perhaps for months or even years, until the wars, poverty and other underlying causes of the dislocations have abated.

On Sunday, Pope Francis called upon Catholic parishes and religious communities to take in refugees. And Germany has called for a quota system to distribute the migrant population evenly throughout Europe. But the European Union remains deeply divided over what should be done, a debate that has strained relations and threatened the 28-nation bloc’s proud policy of open borders.

Far-right politicians, mostly quiet so far, found their voice on Sunday with Marine Le Pen of France, the National Front leader, complaining that a widely dispersed photograph of a drowned Syrian child that had shocked the world was being used to make Europeans “feel guilty.”

A gathering of foreign ministers in Luxembourg on Sunday produced only more discord. More talks are scheduled for this week. Germany, which has admitted by far the largest number of migrants — it expects to accept 800,000 this year — has called upon other nations to accept more, but found much resistance, especially in Eastern Europe.

“We have been facing this challenge for several months, and we continue to take in refugees,” said Peter Altmaier, chief of staff to the German chancellor, Angela Merkel. “But we need a readiness in other European countries to join in.”

Human rights groups say that, for the foreseeable future, there is every reason to expect migrants from Syria and other countries in crisis to descend on Europe in ever greater numbers. In Syria alone, 11 million people have been displaced by war, seven million within the country’s borders and four million outside, mostly to Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan.

The number of Syrians requesting asylum in Europe rose steadily for years before attracting international attention, reaching an estimated 348,000 since April 2011, the month after the civil war there began. The numbers are accelerating as the war worsens — from 8,000 asylum claims in 2011 to 56,000 in 2013 and 150,000 in 2014, according to United Nations figures. Those numbers reflect only asylum claims, not the far greater flow of those claiming refugee status.

Another factor in the increase is the discovery of routes through Turkey and Greece that are safer and often cheaper than the old route through Libya, which involved a perilous land trek and an equally dangerous ride across the Mediterranean Sea. Human rights experts say that the combination of the new routes, an apparently welcoming Europe, deteriorating security in Syria and the higher socioeconomic status of the recent migrants virtually ensures increases. .

Hungary, on the front lines of the crisis and led by an anti-immigrant prime minister and governing party, has sent mixed signals on its intentions. While allowing migrants already in the country to head to the West, officials began a crackdown over the weekend on new arrivals. Hungary opened a new holding camp with space for 1,000 people — surrounded by razor wire and guarded by dogs and the police — in the southern border town of Roszke, and rights groups quickly assailed the camp as inhumane.

Hungary is also building a razor-wire fence along its 108-mile southern border with Serbia, and it has passed harsher laws involving the treatment of migrants and penalties for helping them. Prime Minister Viktor Orban has cast it as a fight for Christian values against a Muslim surge.

On the Austrian border on Sunday, however, cooperation between the Hungarian police and Austrian rail officials created a seamless corridor through Hegyeshalom, the main crossing between Budapest and Vienna.

Magdalena Frank, a real estate agent from Vienna, squatted with a circle of volunteers on the dusty platform at the Hegyeshalom station, part of an assembly line of sandwich makers. “We are waiting for a train of refugees due in a few minutes,” she said, pushing a lock of hair out of her eyes.

All around were piles of diapers, bananas, savory pies, dates and enough bottled water to fill a swimming pool. “When we heard what was happening, I contacted some friends and we decided we had to come and help,” said Barbara Secka, a mechanical engineering student from Vienna. “We all began cooking.”

When the 5 p.m. train from Budapest arrived, a half-hour late and with standing room only, more than 500 migrants poured onto the platform. “Welcome!” the volunteers shouted in English. “Have something to eat!” With stunning efficiency, the volunteers distributed the aid, moved the migrants into the adjacent train and waved goodbye as it pulled out of the station.

Meanwhile, a convoy of more than 100 Austrian vehicles made their way to Budapest on Sunday, vowing to offer rides to Vienna for any migrants who wanted them — and ignoring warnings from the Hungarian authorities that this violated that country’s refugee laws.

Along Hungary’s border with Serbia, the scene was anything but smooth.

“While Europe rejoiced in happy images from Austria and Greece yesterday, refugees crossing into Hungary right now see a very different picture: riot police and a cold, hard ground to sleep on,” Barbora Cernusakova, an Amnesty International researcher, said in a statement released by the group.

The new camp in Roszke was being called a “reception center” by Hungarian officials, though the police on the scene referred to it as an “alien holding center.”

Both migrants and relief groups were reporting harsh treatment and a hostile reception from the border authorities. On the Serbian side, officials temporarily blocked at least some trains headed north, amid numerous reports of the police demanding bribes to allow the migrants to pass.

Omar Hadad, 24, from Dara’a, Syria, had been at a nearby camp along the border before he was shifted on Sunday to one west of Budapest, in the town of Bicske.

“The Hungarian police came into the camp and they beat me with batons,” he said of his time in the holding center near the Serbian border. He peeled off his socks to show a bruised foot and leg.

Journalists were not allowed into the Bicske camp, but the migrants could come out or speak across the entrance gate. Several other migrants rushed toward Mr. Hadad when they saw him displaying his wounds.

“Here, here, look,” said Salam Barajakly, a student from Damascus who began counting off the wounds and scars on his arms, legs and neck that he said he had gotten on the journey to Hungary, some by accident, some from the police, some from crawling under razor-wire fences.

Two men held out smart phones showing videos of the camp where they had been held near the Serbian border. Hundreds of people squatted in the dust while the police tossed sandwiches and bottles of water to them over a barbed-wire fence.

The group had arrived at the Bicske camp an hour earlier and was waiting to make the mile-and-a-quarter walk to the rail station to catch a train toward Hegyeshalom. The Hungarian guards at the camp were encouraging the migrants to go.

Confusion and lack of information were endemic, as they have been throughout the migrant crisis in Budapest. Even the various Hungarian authorities could not agree on the latest rules.

Finally, a railroad official showed up and told her to leave the migrants alone.

“Oh, so no tickets are necessary,” she said. “I guess I don’t have a reason to work anymore, do I?” And she stormed off, taking no one’s ticket.

**AUSTRALIA’S BRUTAL TREATMENT OF MIGRANTS**

**By the editorial board-Sept. 3, 2015**

Some European officials may be tempted to adopt the hard-line approach Australia has used to stem a similar tide of migrants. That would be unconscionable.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has overseen a ruthlessly effective effort to stop boats packed with migrants, many of them refugees, from reaching Australia’s shores. His policies have been inhumane, of dubious legality and strikingly at odds with the country’s tradition of welcoming people fleeing persecution and war.

Since 2013, Australia has deployed its navy to turn back boats with migrants, including asylum seekers, before they could get close to its shores. Military personnel force vessels carrying people from Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Eritrea and other conflict-roiled nations toward Indonesia, where most of the journeys begin. A boat captain recently reported that Australian authorities paid him $30,000 to turn back. If true, that account, which the Australian government has not disputed, would represent a violation of international laws designed to prevent human smuggling and protect asylum seekers.

Those who have not been turned back are held at detention centers run by private contractors on nearby islands, including the tiny nation of Nauru. A report this week by an Australian Senate committee portrayed the Nauru center as a purgatory where children are sexually abused, guards give detainees marijuana in exchange for sex and some asylum seekers are so desperate that they stitch their lips shut in an act of protest. Instead of stopping the abuses, the Australian government has sought to hide them from the world.

The Border Force Act, which took effect July 1, makes it a crime punishable by a two-year prison sentence for employees at detention camps to discuss the conditions there publicly. Australia and Nauru, which depends heavily on Australian foreign aid, have gone to great lengths to keep international journalists from gaining access to the detention center, in which more than 2,200 people have been held since 2012. Last year, Nauru raised the fee it charges for journalists’ visas from $200 to roughly $8,000; applicants who are turned down are not given refunds.

Scores of people who have worked at the camp have become whistle-blowers. More than 40, including medical personnel and social workers, wrote a public letter to senior government officials in July saying they would rather risk arrest than stay quiet. “If we witness child abuse in Australia we are legally obliged to report it to child protection authorities,” they wrote. “If we witness child abuse in detention centers, we can go to prison for attempting to advocate for them effectively.”

European officials have traveled to Australia on fact-finding missions recently. Mr. Abbott, who argues that aggressively intercepting the boats saves lives, has urged European governments to follow his model, and some European leaders seem so inclined.

“The Australian model may seem attractive to politicians,” said Leonard Doyle, a spokesman for the International Organization for Migration. “Politicians love fences, but what fences do is create a market for smugglers and major humanitarian problems.”

The world’s war zones are all but certain to continue to churn out an extraordinary number of refugees and economic migrants in the years ahead. Those people understandably will head to the most prosperous nations, hoping to rebuild their lives. It is inexcusable that some find themselves today in situations that are more hopeless and degrading than the ones that prompted them to flee.

**TRAFFICKING**

**TRAFFICKERS WHO POSE AS WELL-WISHERS, PARENTS WHO REAP BENEFITS, VILLAGERS WHO KEEP QUIET AND COUNTRIES THAT TURN A BLIND EYE. AN INDIA TODAY INVESTIGATION UNCOVERS THE SHOCKING UNDERBELLY OF SEX TRADE THAT HAS SURGED ALARMINGLY IN THE WAKE OF THE DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE IN NEPAL**

Manju was duped by a man who promised marriage and took her across to India where she was forced into prostitution and with great difficulty she escaped. Photo: M Zhazo

Baini. O baini. Kasto chha" Sister, what's up? An NGO worker calls out from a little tin cubicle, fitted with CCTV cameras, on the edge of the 66-feet No Man's Land separating Nepal from India at Sunauli in Uttar Pradesh. The 'sister', in a red nylon dress, hurries towards India, as if she hasn't heard. The NGO worker catches up, with constables of Armed Police Force Nepal in tow: where are you going, why? The 'sister' stutters: she has got a job in India but doesn't know where. The NGO worker makes a few quick calls, tells her no such job exists, packs her off home and starts scanning the horizon again: "O baini."

But for every girl rescued, countless others slip through the cracks of Nepal's porous borders. In June, the police found a girl-hiding inside a hollow tree trunk-near Nautanwa in Maharajganj, a few kilometres away from Sunauli. Since morning they were looking for her on a tip-off by local informers-beating the shrubs, checking under trailing vines, brushing aside tall grass-in the dark woods that border India and Nepal. Someone flashed a torch and spotted her, frozen like a small animal in blinding headlights, with a badly bruised face and rope marks on her wrists. And she began to scream.

**THE CRISIS**

**Sex traffickers on the prowl**

It's the scream of unimaginable loss. Like her country, Nepal, she faces not one tragedy but two. Ten weeks after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake killed nearly 9,000, injured 28,000, displaced 2.8 million and left 600,000 homeless, she is a face among the devastated multitudes: her village, Ramkot, flattened, her home crushed, her mother lost forever in the rubble. But that's just half the story. Like tens of thousands of women, she is also a victim of human greed-snapped up, sold and smuggled into slavery or prostitution-as her country tries to put together shattered pieces of life and landscape. Yet another disquieting presence, sucked into hidden black holes of sin and vice across the world, forced to lead a life of abuse and disease, divorced from social systems, stripped of all identity.

Two million women and girls are especially vulnerable in Nepal, reports the United Nations Population Fund; more than 1.4 million are living in crowded camps; about 28,000 girls, who have lost their family, face serious risk of exploitation. "Unstable atmospheres in the wake of huge disasters give criminals the chance to traffic and enslave vulnerable people," says Anuradha Koirala, founder of Maiti Nepal, a non-profit organisation working with the UN and credited with rescuing over 20,000 women and children. "Human trafficking is growing faster than the arms and drug trade. Yet, unlike those trades, those who buy, sell and use people for sex and cheap labour go unpunished. There has to be a new sense of urgency and political will to tackle the crisis," she says.

Trafficking is not new to Nepal. Some 15,000 girls are sold every year, informs the US State Depart-ment's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. "But after the earthquake, it's very severe now," says Rajendra Gautam of Pokhara, founder of anti-trafficking NGO, 3 Angels Nepal. "About 40-50 girls are rescued every day across the country, compared to about 12 earlier." West Asian countries and China are the new destinations. It's no longer girls with white skin and Mongolian features from poverty-stricken ethnic groups such as Sherpa, Tamang, Badi or Chepang. Anyone can get caught now, from age 10 to 40.

The UN fears that children are being deliberately separated from devastated families and dumped in unregistered child homes.

But the nation hasn't healed. "Body bags are still piling up," says Archana Tamang, international consultant at Human Rights and Equality in Kathmandu. "Aftershocks and quakes keep us on edge. Our whole country is gripped by a profound fear psychosis." The situation is worse in Sindhupalchok, Gorkha, Dhading or Kavre, where 90 per cent villages are in ruins, she explains. "Millions are on survival mode. They have no choice or dreams left. Traffickers are most active there, promising Rs 20,000 to people for whom Rs 500 is a fortune." As monsoon brings down lashing rains, floods and landslides, displaced families are migrating haphazardly in search of safety and livelihood: they are easy prey.

**EASY PREY**

**The 'Safed Bakri' are coming**

"Madam, some 'safed bakri' are coming. Would you like to raid?" Baba, a former trafficker who now helps rescue girls, had alerted Vineeta, founder of The Alliance-Nai Asha, an anti-trafficking NGO in Lucknow, within three days of the quake. "When relief workers started reaching Nepal, a lot of desperate parents were asking them to take their children to India, some asked for money deposits," she says. Brothel owners, scenting an opportunity, started sending out traffickers with relief. "Within days of the earthquake, the number of Nepali girls zoomed in Lucknow brothels."

In Delhi, it was during a sting operation at Kotha 64 on GB Road that Rishi Kant of anti-trafficking outfit Shakti Vahini suspected a red herring. It was right after the earthquake. And his team realised that the brothel-owner was rushing emergency relief to quake victims: sacks of rice, dry lentils, clothes. "In fact, all the girls in the kotha are Nepali. And they were going to their disaster-ravaged villages, dressed to the nines, with relief. God knows what stories they trumped up but a look at them would have been enough for any young girl in a disaster zone to be lured," he says.

**LOST LIVES**

**Lure of a better life**

She once knew a river: Narayani, flowing like shiny ribbon of silver between Nepal and India. Blood red laligura flowers bloomed along its banks, kingfishers skimmed its waves, gharials lurked below. The Daunne range stared down from its majestic height. On April 25, that familiar world came tumbling down. As people set up tents amidst the ruin left by the temblor, she moved in with her family. But soon, men started circling around her, with pretty words, suggesting she leave the village for a better life abroad.

In the end, someone drugged her, possibly a neighbour. She woke up in a cottage across the border in India, hidden on the upper floor. She was kept there with hands tied, untied only to be raped or beaten repeatedly by men, both known and unknown. But somehow local people got the wind of it. Sensing danger, the men fled and she ran out. Now in a 'safe home' in Kathmandu, the teenager is fighting for her rights: she has filed charges against those who trafficked her. And, yes, she wants to keep the child she is carrying. She is ready to fight for that, too. Whether she will again gaze out of her window at the river is still a question.

**TRAFFICKER'S TALE**

**Vicious network of relay**

Dark as ebony, with quick eyes, Manoj, an accused in two trafficking cases, is now out on bail. "I drive taxis. What do I know of trafficking?" he says. Why did he get caught, then? "Bad luck," he says. The first time, because he had a trafficker as a passenger and the second time, some girls at an NGO kiosk pointed him out "falsely". "I was just crossing the border on a cycle." But he knows exactly how girls are ferried across the border: you need five-six people. One to bring a girl from village to town, one to take her to the border, one to collect her from across the border, one to go along with her to a big city. "I have heard all this. I see that the girls come willingly. They want jobs, money, to go abroad or get married."

"It's a vicious circle," says Rishi Kant. Trafficking usually starts with a new man in the village. He always comes across as someone who is married, educated, with a good job. The parents meet him, listen to his talk about opportunities in other cities or countries and his proposal to get good jobs for their girls. According to reports of jailed traffickers by the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal, the oft-heard confession is: "I trapped the girls on the pretext of falling in love with them and promise of a good job." The other is: "I studied her family status and her safety nets, before contacting her or her guardians."

"But these people are at the bottom of the trafficking pyramid and are the least paid," Koirala points out. As the trafficker takes a girl out of the village, a whole ecosystem gives him support. "The driver knows, the guesthouses where they stop on the way know, the shop-owners from whom they buy new clothes for the girls before crossing the border know. The same thing works on the other side of the border, till they reach the destination," says Koirala. At every step, someone different accompanies the girl. "The main criminals are those who sponsor the crime. And rarely they get caught."

The border outpost of Sunauli is a study in chaos: a group of boys with rucksacks stand at a distance, looking worried and speaking on mobile phones. A man in a straw hat and goggles waits in front of an NGO kiosk. A girl stands quietly behind him. A woman with four girls elbows forward. One can hear the cacophony of voices: "We want to visit India", "I'm her uncle. Have lined up a job for her", "I'm going to India with my daughters to shop".

NGO records of girls who are missing since April 25.

Thanks to a 1950 treaty, the 1,751 km of open border between India and Nepal can be crossed by anyone at any time without a passport. "There has been an alarming rise in human trafficking along the border," says B.D. Sharma, director general of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), which guards India's northern frontier. About 30 per cent of trafficking victims the SSB has rescued from Nepal since 2008, and 49 per cent traffickers caught, have been in the last two months. "Of the 26 border posts, 10 are high-risk zones, such as Sunauli in Uttar Pradesh or Raxaul in Bihar," he says. To strengthen vigil, anti-trafficking NGOs from Nepal have been roped in: "Many of the NGO workers are victims of trafficking themselves. They can spot suspects from a mile away." Sunauli is also a trafficker's delight. The chaos allows criminals to navigate below the radar. On a given day, men cluster around games of cards, fruit sellers shove carts, armed jawans strut their guns, monks stand silently, foreign tourists click selfies. Through this heaving mass of humanity, smoke-belching trucks amble by. "About 10,000 people step across the border and over 300 trucks ply daily," says Jitendra Yadav, the station house officer of Indian police. It is estimated that Nepalis spend more than Rs 1 crore daily on their shopping in the Indian market across the border. And everyone watches everyone-just like the giant Buddha eyes painted atop the 'Welcome to Nepal' gateway.

"Traffickers mostly travel by road in small vehicles," says Sharma. Sunauli in UP and Raxaul in Bihar are well connected. As a result, both are major hubs for all sorts of traffickers: human to drugs, fake currency to arms. Sunauli has a history of police confrontation with Lashkar-e-Taiba bomb-makers, Indian Mujahideen leaders and Dawood Ibrahim's henchmen. Raxaul has its own infamous gangs and rampant smuggling of gold, narcotics, contraband and arms. It's also believed to be a safe haven for ISI operatives.

**UNGUARDED CROSSING**

**Traffickers have little to fear**

"We just guard the official crossings. But traffickers use unguarded entry and exit points too," says Dipak Bhatta, who heads NGO 3 Angels Nepal in Sunauli. "There are 22 such entry and exit points in and around Sunauli through which traffickers can get away." Before the earthquake, Bhatta's team used to rescue five-six girls daily. The numbers have now gone up by five times. "It's the tip of the iceberg," he says. "Many more must be using the unmanned crossings."

"Repeated movement along same routes can bring on the spotlight of suspicion. So traffickers take remote, unguarded routes during lean periods and official border crossings during tourist seasons," says Vinod Kumar Bhardwaj of University of Rajasthan, who has conducted research on Nepal trafficking. "Women and girls are brought to cities by one gang and handed over to other gangs," he says.

Some girls are pushed into prostitution locally, some shipped out. At the check post they are sent out in small groups to cross the border. The trafficker never comes with them, but crosses over later. They meet up once they reach India and move toward their destination.

Routes have clearly evolved in India: those from western Nepal take the Sunauli-Maharajganj-Gorakhpur route to move towards huge sex markets in Kanpur, Lucknow, Varanasi, Agra and Delhi. Those from central Nepal cross near Jogbani and Raxaul in Bihar, to move to Patna or catch the Mumbai-bound Jan Sadharan Express. Those from eastern areas cross over near Thakurganj and move to Siliguri, Guwahati and Shillong. From this experience of fieldwork, Bhardwaj believes, "traffickers have little to fear on the way. It goes on with the consent of security forces of both sides of the border." More than half the girls enter local sex markets. The rest move intermittently towards Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata. From there, they may be sent off to other cities within India or outside, especially the Gulf and Malaysia.

Procuring a girl is costly for a trafficker, says Ashis Srivastava, who leads the raids for The Alliance-Nai Asha. "They spend about Rs 10,000-Rs 15,000 just to befriend a girl's parents, build up special bonding and flash one's wealth so that they believe in their promise of good life," he says. Mediators play a role in convincing parents, each getting about Rs 10,000. For crossing the border, one needs to get a taxi, one they trust, who could charge about Rs 3,000-Rs 5,000 for each girl. The trafficker would then try to sell the girl to a brothel for about Rs 50,000-Rs 75,000. They would try to make as much profit as possible in the first year, he explains. "It's a relentless system. A girl has a short shelf life. If she survives the abuse and beatings, if she doesn't die of AIDS or get killed, she becomes a trafficker by her 20s," he says.

**TRICKS AND TRAPS**

**New baits, new destinations**

No border can stop Sonkaliya. Ask her anything and she flashes her six identity cards, each so different that she could be six totally different people. In one, she is employed by Varanasi fashion garment company Win-Win, in another she is a journalist with Community Radio Parivartan 89 MHz, in yet another, she studies in Kapilvastu Multiple Campus. Ask her what she does at Win-Win to get Rs 27,000 a month and she says: "I train." Train what, who? She just repeats, "I train." And who is the quiet girl with her? "My sister, Gita. I am taking her to Win-Win for a job." At a glance, the only certain truth about Sonkaliya is that she is lying.

Fashion, modelling, dance bars, massage parlours, adult entertainment: those are the new baits dangled by scammers. Sonkaliya's Win-Win card is a fake "privilege card", with no address, no details, just one line written on it: "We are the team." Yet about 30 per cent of all those intercepted at the Sunauli border say they work for Win-Win, points out Maya, an NGO volunteer. No one really knows what Win-Win is all about. "They all say that they live in a dormitory in Varanasi." It appears that they get enormous salaries considering they don't have any particular job skill. If one person manages to take three more, they get a commission. Each new recruit would have to cough up Rs 25,000 to enrol. They all say Win-Win is into fashion garments.

In yet another typical case, the Central Investigation Bureau of Nepal (CIB) arrested more than 10 traffickers of Kathmandu in June; they were making rounds in dance bars, in the guise of doing photoshoots for their modelling agencies, and luring girls to go abroad. Most of them had investments in dance bars in West Asia and Africa, where photographs of the girls were being sent, with as much as $3,000 changing hands for a girl. The CIB found that once there, their travel documents were seized and they were forced into adult entertainment and sex. Many were physically beaten, isolated and locked up.

The destination is also changing: India is no longer the main bait. A large number of trafficked girls are sent off to West Asia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, even Africa and Sweden, shows the TIPS report. China is emerging as the new hotspot for adult entertainment and sexual exploitation. In yet another recent raid, the CIB busted a marriage bureau that lured young girls into "paper marriage" with middle-aged Chinese men, ready to pay Rs 15 lakh to Rs 25 lakh for a "foreign bride". Girls were told that the marriage would be in name, while they would work in a company for a hefty salary-enough to allow them to bring their family to China soon. Investigations revealed at least 83 such bureaus operating in and around Kathmandu.

Recruitment and education frauds are the new baits. There have been a series of recent cases where young Nepali students have coughed up huge sums for supposed college admissions at foreign universities, only to find that they have been trapped in appalling conditions or dangerous work, without any way to get out. Lethal networks are developing around organ trade and global terror outfits. The Asia Foundation reports about illegal extraction of kidneys from impoverished villagers of Kavre, for black markets in Delhi and Chennai, for millions. Nepal CIB has uncovered a trafficking racket of smuggling Nepali women, at $7,000 each, to the dangerous Islamic State militia in Syria, for sex and as human shields.

**LOST INNOCENCE**

**Children are not spared**

It was in the course of running her restaurant, Cafe Aamu, in tony Lalitpur that Archana Tamang realised that even children were not being spared. "Right after the earthquake, we decided to send food on every Saturday to an orphanage," she says. But within weeks, she noticed that the number of children were rising or falling, dramatically. Her friend Shashank Sadi, a Bangladeshi expert in disaster risk management, also observed the same trend in a number of unregistered child homes. Sadi consulted Nepal's Central Child Welfare Board. There is now a nationwide circular against relocation of children without authorisation or travelling without parents.

Eight million children are affected by the earthquake. About 950,000 are in makeshift tents or on the streets. At least 245 have been rescued from being trafficked or illegally placed in child care homes. The Unicef has raised concern about "orphanage volun-tourism", to foreigners expressing interest in adoption or orphanage visits. Recently, the police rescued three children who were trafficked from Sindhupalchok to Pokhara by a Chinese woman in the name of adoption.

**LONG ROAD**

**Too many stakeholders**

It's the letter Shakti Vahini wrote to the Union home ministry that has triggered action. The Uttar Pradesh home department, already at work on the project, stepped up vigilance on the border. CCTV cameras were installed on the trafficking trail, anti-trafficking units activated, sensitisation programmes for the police and a network to bring all anti-trafficking stakeholders to solve the problem was taken up. "We had been working on the issue for a while, with the chief minister taking personal interest in it," says Uttar Pradesh Home Secretary Kamal Saksena. There's much more on the anvil, from a capsule on anti-trafficking laws to rehabilitation and skill-development endeavours for the victims. "UP has taken a lead in this. So traffickers are now shifting to Bihar and West Bengal," says Saksena. "Our model can be followed by other states."

"Most of the traffickers are patronised by our leaders," says Vishvendra Paswan, Member of the Constituent Assembly, Nepal. "They work for and are nurtured by our political parties and bureaucrats. What hopes does Nepal have of combating the menace of trafficking?" he asks. Koirala points out that the problem is that there are too many stakeholders involved. "The Nepal government, the home ministry, the law ministry and the judiciary are doing excellent work. But unless the women and social welfare ministry and foreign employment ministry come on board, the loopholes can never be plugged."

"Traffickers are no longer gutkha-chewing, uneducated men and women," says Amitabh Yash, IG of Gorakhpur zone. "They carry cell phones, speak in English, can be respected members of the community." There is evidence that traffickers are increasingly using smart technology to coordinate, swap and share information, move money and services around the world quickly, yet remaining anonymous. "Technology can also be part of the solution, especially biometrics," he says, "especially, fingerprints, retina scan, voice and face recognition." The Unique Identification Authority of India is tying up with child care homes this year to find missing children, curb trafficking and illegal adoptions through biometrics.

Meantime, girls are flying out of Nepal. That's the alert the Interpol has sounded out. At Kathmandu airport, a gaggle of girls, in jeans and crop tops, walk briskly towards the security checkpoint: a spring in their steps, a bright smile on their face and AirAsia boarding passes in their hands. Ask them where they are off to and they chorus in unison: "Malaysia." Why? "We've got jobs." Ask them the name of the company and they balk: "Presiâ?¦. Preseâ?¦," they look at each other. "It's a mobile packaging company," one of the girls pipes up. It may be so, but hardly likely.

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING AFTER THE NEPAL QUAKE**

Sex traders are on the lookout for potential prey in the ruins of quake-ravaged Nepal, and the country’s border with India has made it easier for human trafficking

Like any other girl of her age, she had dreams of making it big. Hard-working and ambitious, she had left home in Surkhet district of Nepal to chase a new life in Kathmandu. Working in a restaurant, she quickly grew popular among the staff, thanks to her job dedication. However, dazzled by the big city and strained by the pulls and pressures of urban life, she was a drug addict by the time she was done with her teens.

Little did the 20-year-old Sindhu know that the earthquake of 25 April would shatter all that was left of her dreams. Wrecked, her restaurant had to shut down. She lost all touch with her family, and roamed around jobless and helpless for several days. That’s when a stranger appeared from nowhere, promising her a better life—in Dubai. As salary, she would get around Rs 1 lakh per month working as a dancer, which was more than ten times her pay of Rs 7,000. All the travel documents she needed would be arranged for her, she was told, once she crossed over to India. It seemed like the opportunity of a lifetime, and she did not take long to make up her mind. Her parents did not need to know.

From Kathmandu, she was taken on a bus to Bhairahwa, a border town near Sonauli in Uttar Pradesh, India. There were other girls in the same bus, she recalls, but she didn’t know any of them. After breakfast at a dhaba in Bhairahwa, it was time now to cross the border. She stepped out and walked ahead just as she was told, even as the person accompanying her kept a safe distance. Past the Nepalese gate and across the 30-metre stretch of no-man’s-land, she was stopped at a checkpoint on the Indian side. A lady constable of the Sashashtra Seema Bal (SSB) had questions to ask of her, queries to which she had no answer.

With no documents to prove her claim of employment in a Delhi restaurant, Sindhu was handed over to Maiti, a Nepal- based NGO which works against human trafficking. “We informed her parents,” says Prabha Khanel, district co-ordinator of Maiti in Bhairahwa, “and they were so happy to hear of their missing daughter.” Sindhu refused to reveal the identity of the trafficker, insisting that she was making the journey by herself. “The trafficker had crossed the border before her,” says Khanel. Her parents broke into tears of joy on seeing theirr missing daughter again. “Maiti is like God,” says her mother, “they got us our daughter back.”

It was a happy family reunion, and the 20-year-old still has choices. “I am back with my parents,” says Sindhu, “But I am not sure what I will do now. I want to work again. Let’s see.”

Not all girls and young women are as lucky. After the earth quakes of late April and early May that shattered large parts of urban Nepal, human traffickers have swooped in to prey on human tragedy. Actual numbers are hard to come by, but a sudden surge in this evil activity is evident in the increased number of interceptions made at various Indo-Nepal border posts. Efforts are being made to stop it, but sadly, they’re not nearly enough.

Human trafficking from Nepal is not a new phenomenon. It was rife even before the earthquake. According to a 2001 study by the International Labour Organization, around 12,000 Nepalese children are taken illegally to India every year. With 2.8 million people left homeless (UN estimates) by the seismic events, however, women and children in the Himalayan country have become all the more vulnerable to the entreaties of those with sinister motives. In some ways, it was a nightmare foreseen. “We feared a surge in trafficking cases after the two earthquakes,” says Tomoo Hozumi, Unicef’s Nepal representative. “Loss of livelihoods and worsening living conditions have allowed traffickers to easily convince parents to give their children up for what they are made to believe will be a better life. Traffickers usually promise education, meals and a better future. But the reality is that many of those children could end up being horrendously exploited and severely abused.”

According to a Unicef report, in the one-and-a-half months since the quakes, at least 245 children have been rescued from being trafficked and unnecessarily or illegally placed in child-care homes. Things are no better even for adult women. The United Nations Population Fund has warned that more than 28,000 women may be at risk of gender violence in the aftermath of the quakes.

“The Indo-Nepal border has many points of vulnerability, as everyone wants to flee Nepal post the earthquakes. This has increased the risk of people falling in the net of human traffickers,” says YK Gautam, state coordinator of Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children, an Indian NGO that works in Bihar. He estimates that around 100,000 families crossed the border in just one month after the quakes.

The collapse of Nepal’s administration, with its attention diverted to saving the lives of those trapped under debris, gave traffickers the chance they were looking for. They started by meeting people at relief camps in the guise of offering aid, and then went on a recruitment drive. “The first incident that came to our notice was 10-15 days after the earthquake,” says Bindu Kunwar, supervisor at the Women and Child office in Nepalgunj district of Nepal. “At Mahendra Nagar naaka, 25 children were intercepted in a bus. On enquiring, it was found they were being taken to India. That raised the alarm.”

In May, 28 children were rescued from a garment factory in Ludhiana, India. “We have rescued 26 children from the clutches of human traffickers in just a month after the quake and sent them to rehabilitation centres,” says Sanjeev Kumar, a senior labour official in Bihar’s East Champaran district. The Maiti office in Nepalgunj has rescued 155 people so far, including 75 girls and 58 women. “The increase in trafficking can be understood from this pattern,” says Khanel. “At the Bhairahwa- Sonauli border, only nine cases of human trafficking were intercepted by us in April this year. It went up to 22 in May and further to 34 in June.” In July, 16 girls were rescued in Mumbai and sent to Bhairahwa by Rescue Foundation, Mumbai. “We kept them here for a few days until their family members arrived to take them back,” says Khanel. More recently, on 25 July, 21 Nepalese girls were rescued from Mahipalpur near Delhi’s airport. The girls were to be flown to Dubai.

India and Nepal share a 1,751 km long border and the amity between the two countries has meant that the security arrangements are light. Geographically, the terrain is largely plain, except for some hilly parts towards the Northeast. While there are 22 check-posts for trade, human transit is allowed at only six border points. But there is no fence to separate territories, and the border is so porous in parts of UP and Bihar that locals see no need for any documents to cross from one side to the other. On top of that, cultural affinity has meant that many families on either side are interrelated through marriage. There are also villages through which the border runs. All of this makes it harder to patrol the border to curb trafficking. “One can check the movement of people at check-posts, but it is practically impossible to monitor it in areas that comprise forests and inhabitants,” says Rajesh Mani, director, Manav Seva Sansthan, Gorakhpur, an NGO working to raise awareness of human trafficking as a scourge. “Patrolling is not possible in these areas, and even if it is there, how can you differentiate among people?”

The US State Department classifies India and Nepal as ‘Tier 2’ countries for trafficking, which implies the governments of these two do not fully comply with the standards put in place for its elimination; however, a visit to these parts makes it clear that heroic efforts are being made by people who care.

Of many border points, the Rupaidiha-Nepalgunj one is perhaps the most vulnerable, given the poor infrastructure and abject living conditions on both sides. The 30 km concrete road from Rupaidiha to Nepalgunj takes more than an hour. The border formalities done, we cross over, drive another 3 km, and take a narrow lane to arrive at a shelter in Nepalgunj run by Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) under the Women and Child Department of the Nepal government. This is a temporary camp for rescued children. “We counsel the children,” says Indra KC, a counsellor at CWIN. “Sometimes they are so scared that they don’t open up.”

Guided into a play room, we see three children busy at a carom board. One of them, 13-year-old Rishi Raj, is asked to join us. “He came day before yesterday,” says Indra KC. The boy looks at us for a moment, before Indra KC interrupts with “He can speak in Hindi.”

“Namaste,” says Rishi with folded hands, and starts narrating his story. A resident of Kathmandu, his father had married another woman and his mother another man. They both moved away, leaving him to fend for himself. It was his maternal grandfather who took him in. With his school forced to close by the earthquake, Rishi would wander around the city. One day, he says, he met a truck driver who promised to show him some nice places if he came along with him. “He told me that I would travel the world with him and then he would drop me at my grandparents’ home,” says Rishi. Without informing anyone, he decided to accompany the man in his truck, who took him to Nepalgunj and then crossed the border while he was asleep in the vehicle. The boy, the check-post was told, was his son.

It was only in Bahraich, 60 km from the border, that volunteers of Dehat, an Indian NGO, took notice of the boy. “He was looking lost and we started enquiring about him,” says Jitendra Chaturvedi, founder and chief executive of Dehat. “Initially, the driver tried to dodge us with his framed story, but he later tried to get away, leaving the boy.” The police were called in and they took the driver away. Rishi was handed over to the Women and Child Department of Nepalgunj. “When we asked him, he didn’t have any idea that he is in India,” says Chaturvedi.

At the shelter home, Rishi is trying to adapt. “While the other two children share a good camaraderie,” observes Indra KC, “Rishi mostly keeps to himself.” To safeguard children, Nepal’s government suspended international adoptions from the country right after the quake, and in early June, it also banned children from travelling between districts without parents or approved guardians. The registration of new orphanages has been suspended too, and existing one cannot induct new children without permission. The relocation of children from their home districts now requires prior authorisation from the Central Child Welfare Board.

But the trafficking of minors and young adults goes on. Chaturvedi says that just a few days earlier, a few girls were rescued by Sathi, another NGO based in Nepal. “We keep a strict vigil on border movements through our volunteers,” he says.

Separating cases of trafficking from those of migration is not always easy. “We cannot stop migration, as it is their right,” says Khanel, “We just ensure that they have the required clearance from government authorities.”

While engaged in conversation with us, her mobile phone rings. It’s a call from Rabin Babu Regmi, a Nepali police inspector at the Bhairahwa-Sonauli border check-post. Two women, it seems, have been intercepted while trying to cross the border. Khanel gets ready to reach the border, around 4 km from her office. We take our own conveyance, and reach in five minutes too. Maiti volunteers show us into a small room, where the two women are. Khanel greets them with a smile, saying, “Aao behen (sisters, please come).” The women, one in her late teens and the other in her twenties, offer no response. They just accompany Khanel in her vehicle, and are taken to the first floor of the Maiti office, which has a hostel for their stay. They are offered food and water, and for the next hour, Khanel is busy talking to them in a closed room. “They are not saying much and we don’t want to trouble them right now,” she says, finally. “Our attempt would be to make them feel normal and at home, and in between we will counsel them.” They may stay at the Bhairahwa shelter for three months at most. If no one of their family comes for them in this period, or if they are unwilling to go back, they would be sent to Maiti’s office in Kathmandu.

Not all young women are taken back by their families. “Those who cross the border and are caught later on are often seen as a stigma on the family,” says Khanel, “Society starts to think that she might have been engaged in ‘illicit activities’, especially sex.” Maiti, however, offers them vocational training. “Our Kathmandu office runs programmes for empowering them with skills for their livelihood,” says Khanel. “Some of them need police or legal support, which is available there.”

There have been cases of families accepting women back after they started earning money. Such is the financial desperation. Even traffickers have started using vocational training as a lure. Many provide their victims dummy courses in ‘computers’ or ‘hotel management’, even printing fake diplomas and job offer letters to fool not only them but also the check-post personnel. But most of them end up at brothels or in jobs where they are sexually exploited.

Some are packed off to Gulf countries. “Most of them claim that they are married to a boy in India, or in some cases the trafficker does marry a girl to take her easily with him,” says Regmi of the Nepal Prahari. “We try to check the truth in their claims through the documents submitted by them.” Mehmood of Maharajganj, UP, tells us the story of his uncle’s family staying in Nepal. His uncle went missing after the earthquake, and her aunt along with her 14-year-old daughter headed back to Maharajganj. On the way, she started getting calls from places like Dubai and Kuwait. “These were marriage proposals for her daughter,” he says. “I was surprised how quickly they start luring families in distress.”

According to Rishikant of Shakti Vahini, an NGO in Delhi that works with the UP Police, offering them trafficking tip-offs, traffickers have recently started using Varanasi as a midway point. Since brothels get raided by the police, he says, they avoid taking the women there directly. “They promise jobs in the garment sector and even create fake companies.

“Human trafficking has emerged as the fastest growing criminal industry and is the second largest after drug trafficking,” says Dinbandhu Vats of the Delhi-based think-tank Pairvi. “Traffickers make nearly $32 billion annually without any investment.” India is both a popular transit point as well as a destination of human trafficking from Nepal. It acts as a base for women sent off to other countries, even as a large number find themselves in various places within the country.

The kingpins who run trafficking networks are extremely hard to catch. Those who do get caught are intermediaries, paid to do what they do. “There’s a long chain of people employed at every step in Nepal and India,” says Keshav Koirala, district coordinator, Maiti, Nepalgunj. But there are some names that keep cropping up. Koirala mentions a Nepalese woman called Kajol, who operates from Delhi. “She keeps changing her location. She is the kingpin of the trade in Delhi and western UP.” Regmi mentions one Anjum Nepali, a trafficker active along the Bhairahwa-Sonauli-Gorakhpur route. Maiti has a list of suspected traffickers that it shares with the police. One of the operators, Vishnu Maya Tamang from Nuwakot, Nepal, was arrested two years ago. Found to be ill, she was released last year. “There is no trace of her since then,” says Khanel, “and in all probability she might be active again.” Another woman trafficker, Dolma Tamang has been at large for the past year or so, evading the police dragnet and thought to be staying in India at present.

Not all traffickers are Nepalese. Indian groups are active as well. Chaturvedi says he recently submitted a list of 17 traffickers who are active in the region to the authorities. In some cases, FIRs have been filed at various police stations, but none of them is in custody. “We are constantly engaged with the SSB in the area to prevent human trafficking,” says Neha Pandey, SP, Bahraich. “Some NGOs are helping us too in tracing the culprits.”

The governments of Nepal and Indian border states have upped the vigil against trafficking, but volunteers are needed. Maiti has check-points at every border passage, where its volunteers in blue salwarand yellow kameez can be spotted. There has been a series of official border meetings organised in which NGOs, locals administrations and NGOs from both sides have participated to work out how best to collaborate in curbing the menace. “All the security agencies posted at the border will have to be active to prevent trafficking,” says Sanjeev Gupta, DIG, Gorakhpur range. “We are also setting up offices of the Anti-Human Trafficking (AHT) cell at the border.”

But there are flaws in the system that need to be addressed. Anti-Human Trafficking cells have been established in 37 border districts of UP. “But the officers are not trained and equipped to handle the situation,” says Rajesh Mani. “Till date, there is no standard operating procedure to guide them on how to deal with trafficking. In most cases, traffickers get away with easy charges rather than being booked under Section 4 and 5 of India’s Immoral Traffic Prevention Act.”

Adds Vats, “The poor compliance with legal protocol coupled with weak enforcement machinery, delays in justice delivery and low conviction rates encourage traffickers to continue their lucrative trade in both countries.” Rehabilitation efforts are not adequate either. “This results in re-trafficking,” says Vats.

This May, four girls were rescued by Indian paramilitary forces and handed over to Nepal’s police. The same girls had been rescued by Sathi earlier, but they somehow ended up in the clutches of traffickers again—using a different route this time. “Traffickers think much faster than we can come up with solutions,” says Chaturvedi. “The issue needs better efforts from various departments of the Government. What we are doing is only to resolve one part of the problem.”

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING HIGH IN TAMIL NADU**

Tamil Nadu had the second highest incidence of crime relating to human trafficking during 2014, after West Bengal, data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows. The State had 509 cases of human trafficking in 2014 with 590 victims and all of them were registered under various sections of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, the data shows.

According to NCRB, human trafficking consists of crimes such as importation of girls from foreign countries, procuring, buying and selling of minors for prostitution.

Pointing out that the number of cases that are reported are only one-third or lesser when compared to the actual crimes committed, S. Ramadoss, assistant professor in the Department of Criminology at the University of Madras said the focus needs to be on rehabilitation and relief of people who have been trafficked and have been rescued.

“Currently, there is no proper follow-up, medical assistance and psychological counselling for those who have been rescued. We should focus on that. Otherwise there is a possibility that they could be trafficked again,” he said.

In 2010, a study by former head of the department R. Thilagaraj for the United Nations Development Programme on trafficking and HIV found that 20 per cent of the victims of trafficking had contracted HIV.

The study had called for a coordinated effort by the police, judiciary and non-governmental organisations dealing with women, children and labour trafficking was imperative to prevent spread of the infection, the study said.

The study found that 42.1 per cent of victims were trafficked when they were children and 93 per cent of those trafficked said their native language was Tamil and called for a uniform single legislation, a separate agency to tackle trafficking in women and children and making it mandatory to register births.

Prof. Thilagaraj had also suggested that it was necessary to conduct a biannual study on trafficking for a few years to identify all source areas. Pointing out that organized gangs also are mainly responsible for the menace, Dr. Ramadoss said punishments need to be more stringent.

**BENGAL TOPS THE LIST IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

The highest number of cases of human trafficking in the country is from West Bengal, which alone accounts for 20 per cent of all reported cases in India. According to the latest data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 5,466 cases of human trafficking were recorded in the country in 2014 of which 1,096 were from West Bengal.

The number of victims of human trafficking is also the highest in the State at 1,200. In all, 8,099 victims of human trafficking were registered in India during 2014. Tamil Nadu recorded the second highest number of 509 cases, less than half of what has been registered in West Bengal.

Under the category of human trafficking, crimes under Section 370/ 370 A of Indian Penal Code include bringing girls from abroad and procuring, buying and selling girls for prostitution. West Bengal also accounts for the bulk of cases relating to procuring minor girls.

**U.P. TO FORM TASK FORCE TO CHECK HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

The Uttar Pradesh government has decided to constitute a task force to check human trafficking on the directive of Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, official sources said on Thursday. It has also been decided to strengthen anti-human trafficking units and give a serious consideration to give them status of police stations, an official spokesman said here. The decisions were taken during State-level advisory committee held on Thursday. It was decided to study rules framed by the other States relating to placement agencies and migrant labour and frame a new rulebook for U.P. For better training of employees involved in checking human trafficking and maintain uniformity it was decided to follow standard operating procedure. It was directed to register complaints relating to missing child on priority basis.

**CHILD LABOUR**

**79 CHILD LABOURERS RESCUED FROM LUDHIANA GARMENT FACTORY, COPS YET TO FILE FIR**

A local NGO, Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), claimed that the number of children rescued was close to 90.

A Special Task Force (STF) on Tuesday rescued 79 child labourers allegedly locked up in a terrace, at a garment factory on Ludhiana’s Rahon Road. The factory is shockingly located right opposite the Meharbaan police station but police said they were unaware it had employed children. A local NGO, Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), claimed that the number of children rescued was close to 90 and alleged that the factory owners presented illegal identity proofs to show that some of the children were over 14 years of age. Majority of the rescued children are aged between 8 and 17 years and were getting paid Rs 50-100 per week. Some allegedly received no wages as they were ‘learners’. When the team — including officials from the labour and factories departments, health department, anti-human trafficking wing, local police station and BBA volunteers — raided the factory, the gates were not opened for more than fifteen minutes.

“What we found was shocking. We estimated 30-35 children to be working here but when the terrace door was opened, almost 90 children were lying on the floor. There was no space and the children had been piled on top of each other and to hide them from us, the owners had put them under bales of cloth,” alleged Dinesh, a BBA volunteer. The children reportedly told the team that they were from Bihar and Nepal and were brought here to work in the factories. “Despite provisions for immediate registration of FIRs in such cases, neither police nor the labour department have taken action against the factory owner,” Dinesh said. “The Child Labour (Prohibition and Rehabilitation) Act, 1986, calls for one year imprisonment and a fine of Rs 20,000 for the accused. Similarly, the Juvenile Justice Act, 2000, calls for one year jail and Rs 10,000 fine. Even the Bonded Labor Act calls for minimum three years punishment but even when we rescue child getting minimum wages from factories, FIRs are not registered,” Dinesh alleged. The administration, meanwhile, appeared to pass the buck on the issue. Ramninder Singh, SHO Meharbaan police station, said, “We were not aware of so many child labourers working at the factory opposite the police station. The anti-human trafficking wing will take action after the labour department submits a written complaint”. Shamsher Singh, in-charge of the anti-human trafficking wing said, “We can register FIR only after labour department gives us in written the proceedings of the raid.” Mohit Singla, assistant director factories who raided the factory said, “We raided S S Bobby Garments on Rahon road from where 79 child labourers were found. Police can take suo motto action and register an FIR against owner. It is not mandatory for us to file the written complaint”. Ludhiana DC Rajat Aggarwal said, “I will look into the matter on why FIR is not being done and necessary action will be taken”.

**ENVIRONMENT**

**THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN YOUR CLOSET**

FILED UNDER: Tech & Science, River pollution, Fashion, Clothing

Approach the massive Orathupalayam Dam by road, and it quickly becomes clear that something has gone terribly wrong. Within 2 miles of the dam, the lush rice paddies, coconut palms and banana trees that have characterized this part of southern India suddenly give way to a parched, bright red landscape, dotted only with scrub forest. The Noyyal River, which used to be clean and clear, now runs foamy and green, polluted with the toxic runoff of the titanic textile industry 20 miles to the west, in Tirupur.

At first glance, Tirupur, aka “Knit City,” appears to be an exemplar of how globalization can improve the developing world. The garment industry here in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu earns billions of dollars annually, employs about a half-million people and exports clothes to Europe and the United States. Chances are good that if you have a Gap, Tommy Hilfiger or Wal-Mart T-shirt marked “Made in India,” it came from here.

American taxpayers have played a key role in turning Tirupur into a manufacturing powerhouse. In 2002, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) loaned $25 million to the government of Tamil Nadu and a local clothing industry group, the Tirupur Exporters Association, to finance a new water-delivery system. It kick-started a slew of investment into the project; a local consortium eventually raised an additional $220 million. The U.S. consulate in Chennai in a 2006 press release explained that before the American intervention, the local industry “was running out of water, a critical input for dyeing and bleaching.” As a side note, the release noted that the thousands of slum dwellers in the area could finally have access to treated, running water.

The USAID project, which piped in clean water from a stretch of the Noyyal in a nearby farming region, helped the local industry boom. Between 2002 and 2012, U.S. knitwear imports from India jumped from $571 million to $1.25 billion, and an estimated 56 percent of those garments came from Tirupur. But all that growth has had devastating consequences for the environment and people living in the area. In early April 2013, I met the leader of the Orathupalayam Farmers Association, Chelliappan Udayakumar, near the Orathupalayam Dam. For generations, Udayakumar’s family farmed this land, growing local crops such as rice, banana, coconut and turmeric. “There were good jobs and good livelihood,” says Udayakumar. Now, “there is no cultivation of the land, no income.” The small-scale agriculture lifestyle that characterized the region for centuries, he says, has “fully collapsed.”

He walked me through Orathupalayam village, a small town at the base of the dam. Abandoned brick homes painted light blue and topped with red tile roofs dominated the main square. Plaques on the homes commemorated their erection—most date from the late 1980s, when construction of the dam began. Twentyfive years later, the Orathupalayam is one of over 60 villages that have been transformed into ghost towns.

The dam was supposed to update agricultural irrigation practices in Tirupur. But by the mid-2000s, the water was so saturated with chemicals, salts and heavy metals that local farmers were petitioning the Madras High Court—the highest court in Tamil Nadu—to not release the water into their fields. It was making farmland unusable and locals sick. In 2002 and 2003, a local university set up three camps to examine the health effects of the toxins downstream. In one of the camps, doctors found that about 30 percent of villagers suffered from symptoms—including joint pain, gastritis, problems breathing and ulcers—connected to waterborne diseases. A 2007 study by a local nongovernmental organization found that Tirupur’s 729 dyeing units were flushing 23 million gallons per day of mostly untreated wastewater into the Noyyal River, the majority of which collected in the Orathupalayam Dam reservoir. When officials finally flushed the dam in the mid-2000s, 400 tons of dead fish were found at the bottom.

A couple of weeks after I visited Tirupur, on April 24, 2013, Rana Plaza, an eight-floor complex of clothing factories in Dhaka, Bangladesh, caved in, burying over 1,100 workers in the rubble. As the dead dominated newscasts, brands like Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and United Colors of Benetton momentarily defended their labor and safety records. Activists called for boycotts, and President Barack Obama even revoked Bangladesh's right to export certain clothing to the U.S. without paying tariffs.

Poor working conditions in the South Asian garment industry have led to far too many disasters, such as this factory building collapse near Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 2013. Pushed by poverty and pulled by the hope of a better life, the residents of the village of Tekani, Bangladesh have for almost a decade been making the trip south to the capital to demand better safety conditions and unpolluted waters. Some in India far similar working conditions are in store for them as well if factories and industrialists are left to run amok.

Rana Plaza resonated with American consumers. After all, even Bangladeshi women earning less than two bucks a day deserved to go to work in the morning confident that they would be alive that evening. But while the disaster did force Westerners to take notice of the plight of those who make their clothes, a larger environmental crisis in the region continued unnoticed—despite impacting many hundreds of millions of people.

According to Yixiu Wu, who helms Greenpeace’s “Detox My Fashion” campaign, the average pair of jeans requires 1,850 gallons of water to process; T-shirts require 715 gallons. And after going through the manufacturing process, all that water often ends up horribly polluted. The textile industry today is the second largest polluter of clean water after agriculture, and it has an outsized effect on the people of Asia. In large part, that’s because over the past two decades American clothing brands have steadily moved production out of the U.S. and into Asia. The American Apparel and Footwear Association estimate its members outsource the manufacturing of 97 percent of their clothing, more than 75 percent of it to Asia. “Simply put: We are a nation of 330 million importers,” the trade group says. The benefit to the U.S. consumer is clear: Just drive to a nearby mall and pop into H&M, Uniqlo, Gap or any other fast-fashion label, and check the clothing tags. It’s likely that they’ll say the garments were made in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, China or Bangladesh—all countries competing to make a T-shirt that costs Americans and Europeans just $5 but takes a heavy toll on the people at its source. Near critically polluted waters like Bangladesh’s River Buriganga and Cambodia’s Mekong River, life-sustaining farms are dying, potable water has become toxic and locals are now at great risk for serious illness, all as a result of industrial-scale clothing manufacturing.

At the core of this environmental and health disaster is the poor state of regulatory institutions throughout much of South and East Asia. Transparency International’s annual Corruption Perception Index paints a dispiriting picture: Cambodia and Burma (two of the latest hot spots for textile manufacturing) are tied with Zimbabwe at 156 out of 175 countries ranked, while Laos and Bangladesh are tied at 145. India fares a lot better at 86, but even there, human rights and environmental preservation are often trumped by the need to provide a business environment that can compete with more corrupt countries. In a 2013 study, Indian environmental scholar Geetanjoy Sahu investigated the country’s various state pollution control boards, responsible for regulating the environmental impact of all sorts of industries, including clothing manufacturing. Sahu, drawing on data gathered through Right to Information Act requests (similar to the U.S. Freedom of Information Act), found that the boards are often underfunded, understaffed and run by political appointees with no scientific background.

The pollution control boards for two ocean-facing Indian states frequently cited as development models—Tamil Nadu and Gujarat—are especially corrupt. For example, a 2008 paper by Sahu explains in detail how the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board failed to stop the massive spread of pollution from leather tanneries. In February 2015, a wall in a pit holding tannery effluent collapsed, drowning 10 employees in toxic sludge. The plant had been approved by two TNPCB inspectors, who were arrested and jailed for allegedly receiving a bribe of more than $3,000 to approve the factory’s license. The two men are facing charges in a local court in Tamil Nadu of three counts of corruption, reckless endangerment, negligence and involuntary manslaughter. A third, more senior, official is also being investigated. Pamela Ellsworth, chairperson of the Fashion Institute of Technology’s Global Fashion Management Program and a supply chain expert, says the core problem is that people in the U.S. and Europe expect both a low price and a responsible corporation—and the margins clothing companies require often make it difficult for suppliers to meet corporate vendor codes of conduct and still earn a profit. “Eventually we are going to have to train consumers in the U.S. to pay more for clothing,” she says. “It can't be the only commodity that gets cheaper every year.”

**Bottled Water Unfit to Drink**:

In the wake of the Rana Plaza disaster, India’s clothing industry has presented itself as the sustainable, safer alternative to Bangladesh. On September 19, 2013, the Tirupur Exporters Association and the Indian Consulate in New York City co-hosted an event in Manhattan’s Garment District, a few blocks from the 34th Street fast-fashion strip. The event was designed to attract orders from American clothing brands, and the message was simple: Fiascos like Rana Plaza won’t happen in India.

"The Indian apparel industry is compliance-oriented, and we follow all the rules of the game,” Arumugam Sakthivel, president of the association, told the Press Trust of India at the time. Sinnathamby Prithviraj isn’t buying it. The chubby, pompadour and mustachioed social activist is one of the leading critics of the local clothing industry. He’s been fighting for years to publicize—and end—the industry’s polluting practices. In 2007, after a decade-long legal battle to shut down dyers who flagrantly violated pollution rules to supply major U.S. brands, Prithviraj and a group of farmers won a decision by the Supreme Court of India to shutter any dyers who hadn’t brought their liquid discharge down to zero. But India's legal system moves slowly. The Dyers Association of Tirupur filed appeal after appeal, and the dyers continued to operate in the interim, despite being in contempt of the court’s decision.

Meanwhile, as orders from major brands like Gap and Wal-Mart increased, so did the release of even more toxic wastewater. Then, in 2011, in what seemed like a triumph for the environmentalists, India’s Supreme Court told the utility company in Tamil Nadu to cut power to any dyeing factories in contempt of its order. Most of the factories could not afford to conform to the requirements and ended up shutting down.

But this turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory for Prithviraj and his farmers. Wildcat dyers in outlying districts sprang up, and soon Tirupur’s garment pollution problem had spread statewide. In Namakkal, an adjacent district where inspectors are engaged in a game of whack-a-mole to shut down illegal dyers, M. Murugan, the pollution control board’s local environmental engineer, admits he’s fighting a losing battle. “Many units are small, mobile and can function without electricity,” he says. Over the past two years, the Namakkal pollution control board has averaged one or two raids per month. “ Ultimately, if we demolish [the dyeing industry] in Namakkal, in some other place it will come again,” he says.

In April 2013, Prithviraj told me he wasn’t sure what to do next. “Although we won the case, practically, we lost it. We don’t have the eyes and human resources to watch what’s going on illegally.” And, he added, India is “a country where anything can be done illegally.”

The next day, Prithviraj sent me out with his driver to see just how lawless the industry can be. For about an hour, my photographer and I snooped around a government-run industrial park home to a number of textile factories. But as I was gathering water samples from the river, the photographer strayed across a bridge to take pictures of a nearby factory, which he believed was illegally discharging waste into the ditch in front of the building. That’s when men began to approach us from several directions. I ran to the car to avoid a confrontation; the photographer seemed less concerned and kept snapping shots.

I yelled for him to speed up and get back in our SUV, but he waved me off, strolling leisurely back to the vehicle. A large crowd gathered. A minute later, we were trapped. One of our pursuers, a brawny man in his early 30s with a shaved head and a clean, striped button-down shirt, blocked our car with his body. An older man joined him and produced a card saying he was from the TNPCB. Our driver, who had seen many such cards, immediately said it was a counterfeit.

But the man with the shaved head took charge, warning us that we needed to “take the proper permissions to be here.” He introduced himself as “a local political leader.” We later found out that he was Jagadesh Np—one of the owners of Spencer Apparel, a dyeing company that makes clothes for an Indian department store chain, Westside. When I called Spencer Apparel, a man who identified himself as Rajesh Np, Jagadesh’s brother, got on the line. At first, he yelled, questioning angrily why we had been on the grounds of the government industrial park without special permission. After talking for a few minutes, he changed tack, suddenly inviting us back. “I can give you a detailed explanation about everything and show you everything so that you can write a very good article,” he said. And he promised, “In Tirupur, most of us do eco-friendly dyeing. Everything is nonhazardous.”

But as Vidiyal Sekar, a former Tamil Nadu state legislative assembly member representing Tirupur, points out, “Eighty percent of dyers do not properly discharge their waste.” Sekar did not speak directly to the practices at Spencer Apparel. But he added that much of the blame should be placed on TNPCB officials, anyway: “All the pollution department officers do is take a lot of money from these small factories and allow them to operate freely.” The TNPCB, Sekar says, is “100 percent corrupt.”

Lack of accountability means that it’s nearly impossible to figure out which companies were legally operating dyeing plants and which were not. In June 2013, I spoke numerous times on the phone with then-TNPCB Member Secretary S. Balaji, who was steadfastly evasive. In July 2013, H. Malleshappa replaced Balaji. Malleshappa also did not answer any phone messages fromNewsweek. Late in 2013, a group of environmentalists launched a public interest lawsuit to remove Malleshappa from office, claiming that he was unqualified. Malleshappa eventually left the position soon after an incident in which almost 1,000 illegal bottled water plants were found in his district. Much of the water was unsafe for human consumption. Despite the scandal, Malleshappa remains in a position of power: He is now head of the state’s Department of the Environment. His replacement at the TNPCB, K. Karthikeyan, didn’t last long either. He was forced out when a local crusading journalist revealed that Karthikeyan had been under investigation for corruption when he was appointed.

Meanwhile, according to the most recent information available on the TNPCB website, Spencer Apparel does not have permission to run a dyeing unit. Neither do many other companies operating in Tamil Nadu. Raagam Exports, for example, has for a long time manufactured clothing for the Spanish street wear label Desigual and other European brands. After being officially told to stop operations in 2011, Raagam, along with 12 other large Tamil Nadu dyers, appealed to India’s National Green Tribunal, the country’s highest environmental court, claiming they’d received permission from the Tirupur District Environmental Engineer to resume operations. But the court found that only the TNPCB’s head office in Chennai could grant them permission to reopen—and that they still hadn’t achieved the zero-liquid discharge required for that consent. In October 2011, the court dismissed Raagam’s case.

Borja Castaneda, Desigual’s marketing director, says the company has been working with Raagam since 2012. “They have the temporary license to run the dyeing unit,” Castaneda wrote in an email to Newsweek. “This license has been annually renewed (including the one for 2015) as they are still pending to receive the final one.” However, Desigual was unable to provide documentation of the licensing. It was also unable to send over documentation of the audits it claims to undertake regularly. “Unfortunately, these are confidential,” said Castaneda.

Raagam Exports was also unwilling to provide proof of its license to operate; its website has a “Compliance” section, but does not include any TNPCB licensing. And the TNPCB website provides nothing that can help to ascertain whether Raagam is currently licensed. Meanwhile, the company continues to send clothes to international brands—Desigual, for example, received its most recent shipment—almost 260 pounds of multihued viscose dresses - from Raagam in July 2015.

**THE GAP GAP**

P.N. Shamuhasundar runs Mastro Colours, a small hosiery dyer on Tirupur’s outskirts. The state government gave him and about 20 other dyers a $4 million, no-interest loan to overhaul and modernize their shared effluent treatment plant. Mastro is now certified as having “zero liquid discharge,” but the extra cost of treating and evaporating that liquid waste (instead of just dumping it into the river) means it can’t compete with polluting dyers.

Prithviraj believes American consumers are complicit here. “We feel that selling a T-shirt for $10 is a sin,” he says. “Is it fair Wal-Mart makes $8 off a T-shirt and gives nothing to the labor, nothing to the environment?” Shipping records provided by Datamyne, which tracks import-export transactions in the Americas, show that between 2007 and 2011, Wal-Mart’s orders increased from Tirupur clothing companies who dyed garments in defiance of the court-ordered shutdown. Take Balu Exports, for example. On its website, the company describes itself as a “vertical set-up under one roof.” Two of its divisions, Balu Process and Balu Exports Dyeing, are members of the Dyers Association of Tirupur. And since 2007, the association has operated in contempt of India’s Supreme Court order to reach zero discharge.

During the 2000's Wal-mart's orders from Balu Exports increased, despite the fact that the company was operating an illegal dyeing factory. Newsweek Repeated inquiries to Wal-Mart over the years about its reliance on toxic dyeing companies have been unanswered. In 2015, after receiving detailed shipping records and documentation highlighting the illegal operating status of Balu and other companies from which Wal-Mart sources, Juan Andres Larenas Diaz, director of communications for international corporate affairs, sent a written statement to Newsweek: “Our expectation and a contractual requirement of doing business with us is that our suppliers and their subcontractors are in compliance with the law. Our relationship with garment suppliers in Tirupur has always been based on their ability to meet Wal-Mart’s supplier standards and code of conduct.” But Diaz would not address specific allegations.

Prithviraj says he’s been similarly frustrated in attempts to engage Wal-Mart. Talking to Wal-Mart is like “banging your head against a wall,” he says. Instead, he suggested, we should try asking some “big brands”—like Gap, J.C. Penney, Tommy Hilfiger—about their record in Tirupur. Gap Inc. has long been on the radar of environmental activists. Every year, Greenpeace’s garment monitoring unit—called the Detox Catwalk—places major clothing companies in three categories: winners, green washers and losers. Gap Inc. is one of the most well-known “losers,” based on the company’s refusal to disclose hazardous chemicals and unwillingness to commit to stop using them.

Over the past 15 years, Gap Inc. has increasingly outsourced its manufacturing. The company says it has a field team of 40 sustainability experts around the world who make both announced and unannounced visits to nearly all of the factories where its clothing is made. However, it also has come to rely on inspection from third-party firms in order to ensure its indirect suppliers—such as mills and dyers—are adhering to the company’s vendor code of conduct.

In its 2011-2012 Social and Environmental Responsibility Report (the most recent publicly available), Gap Inc. admits that it does not have direct control over its supply chain, and things appear to be getting worse. In 2005, 10 to 24.99 percent of its factories in South Asia had violations in their Vendor Code of Conduct- mandated environmental management systems; by 2012, that rose to over 50 percent.

“If over 50 percent of their suppliers are not in compliance, then environmental issues are not a factor in the Gap's supplier selection process,” says Heather White, a supply-chain expert and fellow at Harvard University’s Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics . White adds that in many cases, factories end up paying auditors for an inspection report, and in those cases, “the quality of the findings suffers.” That’s because auditors are more likely to keep their jobs if the factories pass inspections. Bribery is common, White says—though she was not able to speak directly to activities within Gap’s supply chain.

The issue, ultimately, is that the compliance measures taken by retailers like Gap, Desigual and the dozens of other firms sourcing garments in Tirupur don’t account for the complexity of modern clothing-supply chains. Fabric is frequently taken from a mill, dyed at a second facility (owned by the same parent company) and then sewn into finished garments at a third factory (ditto). A corporate auditor, examining the factory and the final product, would find it difficult to determine where the cloth has been dyed. Even visiting a dyeing facility isn’t enough; it’s easy for a given dyeing facility to subcontract some portion of its dyeing orders to smaller, unauthorized units. And it’s even unlikely that an inspector is present when effluent is treated—or released directly into the Noyyal, or dumped in a local field in the middle of the night. Auditing and even TNPCB approval, says Prithviraj, provide little more than a veneer of plausible deniability. “It’s a very sophisticated system of lying,” he says.

Over the last decade, J.C. Penney has taken shipments from many Tirupur-based exporters, including Eastman Exports. News week.

A representative for J.C. Penney, for example, told Newsweek that “to the best of our knowledge it does not appear that J.C. Penney has any dyeing business in that area,” despite records showing that the company has been taking shipment for years from numerous vertically integrated manufacturers in the Tirupur area, including Eastman Exports. According to N. Chandran, chairman and managing director of Eastman, the company owns and legally operates India Dying Mills located in nearby Erode. But because J.C. Penney buys from Eastman 's “finishing” arms, it could feasibly deny knowledge of the dyeing operations involved.

“We confirmed with Eastman Exports that no dyeing services were performed for J.C. Penney's private brand merchandise in those factories,” its representative wrote in an email.

According to Gap Inc., the situation in South India has improved dramatically in recent years. Spokeswoman Laura Wilkinson told Newsweek that all the company’s third-party auditors are paid for by corporate, and as of June 30, 2015, approximately 90 percent of the company’s approved facilities in South Asia have an environmental management system. “We recognize there is a still long way to go,” says Wilkinson, “and it will require sustained, and collective, effort to have the most lasting impact.” Many of the other companies that rely on factories in South and East Asia offer similar promises. “Since we are operating in a water-intense industry, we have worked actively to reduce negative water impacts in different parts of the value chain for more than 10 years,” says Ulrika Isaksson, an H&M spokeswoman.

“Our goal is to become the fashion industry’s leading water steward.” (H&M is one of Greenpeace's “winners”; it also publishes a supplier list, which includes both primary manufacturers and secondary suppliers like dyers.) Others, including Uniqlo and Tommy Hilfiger, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Gap, for its part, has made a commitment to achieve zero liquid discharge in all its supplier factories by 2020. But even if it makes good on the promise, for many farmers in and around Tirupur, it’s likely to be too late.

**ROTTEN COCONUTS**

When I returned to Tirupur in January 2015, the Orathupalayam Dam was still filled with green, foamy water. The few locals who have remained in the area struggle to survive.

Karuppaiah Subramanyam has lived and farmed near the dam for many years. From his house, I could see some scrub grass and a smattering of coconut trees, but when I looked a little more closely, the damage became clear: The coconuts—his only crop—were undersized, and many came off the tree already rotten.

Subramanyam’s 7-acre farm, which was in his family for several generations, remains the same size it's always been, but it has now become essentially worthless. When Tirupur’s clothing industry began producing more clothes and even more toxic runoff, he lost about half his crop, because his primary water source became unusable. “We can only do rain-fed agriculture now,” he explains. Before 1995, he could grow eggplant, green chilies, tomatoes, rice, turmeric and tobacco. Now he has to buy all that on the market, with the meager funds he gets from his remaining, undernourished coconuts.

Asked whether he ever received compensation for his losses, he simply shakes his head. There were some court cases, but only the largest landholders with the best legal representation were compensated. Smaller farmers, like Subramanyam, got nothing. Prithviraj led 4,000 of these excluded farmers in an appeal to the Madras High Court, which ultimately decided they should all be remunerated by the dyers association for land that was made barren by the release of toxic textile runoff. Still, that’s only a fraction of the nearly 30,000 farmers Prithviraj estimates lost their livelihood.

Meanwhile, illegal dyeing units continue to surface regularly. “Some of the new dyeing factories are coming up in other river basins and even in the coastal areas,” says Prithviraj. He mentions Cuddalore, an ancient seaport town about 200 miles east, where chemical pollution in some areas has already raised the risk that residents will contract cancer in their lifetimes at least 2,000 times that of the average person. Even if all the polluting ceased immediately, the damage is already done; it might be impossible to clean and regenerate the Noyyal River and the soil along its basin, says Prithviraj. “We’d have to turn back the clock 20 years.”

**NEW INITIATIVE IN DINDIGUL TO REDUCE RISKS FOR YOUNG WORKERS**

**Program Launched In Dindigul District on 4th September 2015**

Peace Trust, Serene Secular Social Service Society and Child Voice have today launched a programme to reduce young workers’ vulnerability to high-risk jobs in the textile industry. While welcoming all the participants Dr.J.Paul Baskar, Chairman, Peace Trust stated that “these organisations proposed to work alongside local bodies, Government agencies and businesses to improve jobs for young women while providing educational support to the vulnerable children. This new initiative will also arrange skill training to adolescent girls and livelihood support for the vulnerable families. These NGOs will be supported through new grants provided by the Freedom Fund”. He also said that this initial three-year program in Dindigul district, is coordinated by Geneva Global, led by Program Managers P.Bala Murugan and K.Abdul Jaleel.

While inaugurating the program Dr.G.Palanithurai, Professor, Gandhigram University thanked the NGOs for initiating such program to protect the rights of the vulnerable adolescent girls and young workers. Developmentalism coupled with consumerism is resulting to a lot of social issues, young workers vulnerability to high risk job is one such issue and it is essential to generate awareness among the vulnerable section to be able improve their skill level and get a gainful employment.

Mr.Bala Murugan, Program Manager, Geneva Global told that “in Tamil Nadu, the textile industry is a vital source of employment and income. But for some adolescent girls, young women, and inter-state migrant workers, recruited into the spinning mills, face difficult situations. In recent years, initiatives led by government, business and civil society have led to improvements in labour conditions in many garment factories, but widespread problems still exist in the industry, especially in some spinning mills which this program will address”.

“In this initiative, we look forward to collaborating with local government, industry, unions and above all the participating communities, to make a better and safer situation for younger workers and generate a wider range of opportunities for adolescents under 18” K. A.Jaleel, Program Manager, Geneva Global.

While delivering special address Mr.Annadurai, Managing Trustee, Child Voice stated that “in each village, the NGOs will work closely with groups of the families that are under the greatest pressure for their under 18 year olds to go into unsafe work. They will help families develop better economic opportunities and reduce their reliance on moneylenders, while improving the performance of government assistance schemes. In alliance with PRIs, the groups will focus on ways for adolescents to get more benefit from going to school and from vocational training, and be able to protect each other from risky recruitment”.

Mr.James Victor, Secretary, Serene Secular Social Service Society said that “the program covers 85 villages in four blocks viz., Dindigul, Vedasandur, Sanarpatty and Nilakottai of Dindigul district. The major activities includes formation and strengthening of Community Support Groups, adolescent groups, awareness on workers’ rights and safe migration, support for education, health camps, exposure visits, skill training, livelihood support, linking with existing social protection schemes, life skill education, policy advocacy etc”.

During the felicitation Mrs. Poongodi, District Social Welfare Officer said that education for the adolescent girls under 18 is very essential and our Government is providing all necessary support for the needy children to continue their education under the institutional care. She appealed to the participants to report their grievances in this regard and the Department will take care of the vulnerable children as per the Tamil Nadu Hostels and Homes for Women and Children (Regulation) Act. She thanked the NGOs for initiating such unique program to contribute to the Government efforts in protecting the rights of the adolescent girls.

Dr. Sathya Narayanan, District Child Protection Officer appealed to the participants to contact 1098 to report the children in difficult situation and the Department will take of the child’s educational and other essential needs. More than 100 young workers from all over the district participated in the programme organized in Peace Trust conference hall, Dindigul. Mr. Srinivasan, Program Manager, Peace Trust proposed vote of thanks.

**CHILDREN CHARTER CONSULTATION**

Peace Trust has participated in “Children Charter Consultation” held on 29th August 2015 at Viudhunagar, organized by SPEECH. Three Children from Peace Trust joined with other Children from six districts such as Madurai, Dindigul, Theni, Trichy, Virudhunagar and Pudukottai participated in the consultation

This program was aimed to advocate the voice of the children. Child activists including Dr. J. Paul Baskar, Chairman Peace Trust and Srinivasan participated in the consultation called upon all governments to build on the success of the MDGs and address their unfinished business for children, particularly those who suffer the worst forms of deprivation, so that they have access to quality services that guarantee their rights to survival, development, protection and well-being. Children who participated in consultation shared that still they could not enjoy their rights as the society is not well aware of the various rights of the children.

**THE CHRISTIAN CHILDREN FUND OF CANADA FACILITATED THE EVENT EFFECTIVELY**

**NETWORK TO REDUCE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR**

Peace Trust along with six other NGOs such as CEEMA, REED, POLE, Jeevan Trust and Don Bosco Social Secure Society formed a network to plan and launch initiatives to reduce worst form of Child Labor in Dindigul, Tirupur, Erode and Salem districts. The first meeting was held on 29th August, 2015 at CEEMA Office, Erode. Representatives from all these NGO participated and discussed the worst form of Child Labor in various sectors especially textile industries in their target area. They also discussed on the intervention aspects such as prevention, provision and promotion to reduce the worst forms of Child Labour.

**YOUNG WORKERS CONSULTATION IN ERODE**

Peace Trust has participated in the freedom spot programme conducted in Erode on 21st july, 2015 organized by Geneva Global in which 13 NGOs from four districts viz Dindigul, Erode, Namakkal, Virudhunagar have participated in the programme. The Programme Managers of Geneva Global Mr. P. Bala Murugan and Mr. K. A. Abdul Jaleel have coordinated the meeting. The detailed action plan of the programme and the steps needed to be taken was discussed. Dr. J. Paul Baskar from Peace Trust has participated in the programme.

**B.ED PROGRAMME INAGURATION**

**PEACE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

Peace College of Education has inaugurated the current academic year 2015-16 B.Ed., programme on 24th August, 2015. Mr. D. Devadayan, Principal-In Charge welcomed the trainees. Dr. J. Paul Baskar delivered his presidential address, and stated that the students should become partner not participant in the programme. He also congratulated the rank holders of the College of the academic year 2014-15. Ms. Pandeeswari, Ms. Angeline Ranjana, Ms. Kayalvizhi were honored with Citation and a Wrist Watch. Mr. Jawahar Lal, Founder –Principal of Bright Riders School, Western Region, Abu Dubai, UAE, delivered the inaugural address. He delivered an inspiring speech among the students; he stressed the students to have self confidence to achieve their goal. Mr. P. Seelan Stephen, Principal of Christian Matric Higher Secondary School, Oddanchatram delivered his admiring speech to all the students. Mr. Ma. Pa. Gurusamy, Secretary, Gandhi Museum Madurai has explained the specialty of Peace College of Education. Brother M. Alfred William Principal of St. Patrick Academy Matric Higher Secondary School presented in facilitation address. Mr. Jeya Seelan, Asst. Professor, Peace College of Education, proposed vote of thanks.

**SPECIAL SEMINAR ON TAMIL TRADITIONS AND THE FUTURE OF TAMIL**

Peace College Education has conducted a seminar on “Tamil Traditions and the Future of Tamil” on 2th August, 2015 at Peace College of Education. Dr.Philip Sudhakar from Public Relations and Communication Centre of Dindigul Catholic Diocese welcomed the participants. Dr .J. Paul Baskar Correspondent Peace College of Education presided over the seminar. A special lecture by was given Dr Bejamin Lebo Founder of Kamban Kazhagam in France. Mr. Albert Tamil Ulagam Foundation USA, Dr Muthiah from Gandhigram University, Dr Ma Pa Gurusamy Secretary Gandhi Musuem Madurai, Prof Sarojini Puthiavan, Thiru Ramamurthy Ilakkia Kalam have presented their felicitation address. Mr. Kather Batcha from Pasumai FM has delivered vote of thanks.

**VOLUNTEERS AT SPSC - VEEF**

This year’s German volunteers Ms. Lisa and Ms. Hanna arrived at SPSC – VEEF centerat Velankanni. They will be with us helping in documentation, Social media and teach English to young people undergoing skill training programme. We are awaiting recognition to the course from State Authorities.

**ONAM FESTIVAL CONDUCTED BY DEPARTMENT OF CATERING TECHNOLOGY**

SPSC – VEEF have celebrated Onam Festival on August 12th, 2015 and it was celebrated by the department of Catering Technology. Mr.Asan Sathali, Principal of Bharath International Institute of Hotel Management, Thiruvarur has been inaugurated the "Onam Festival" and delivered the special speech to the students of SPSC VEEF Industrial School. He has motivated the students to work hard and definitely you will get employment and further try to put them in place after completing the course. Mr. Pushparaj, Instructor of Catering Technology has proposed Vote of Thanks.