

LETTERS

SEX FOR SHELTER

As daylight fades, boys aged 8 to 18 begin to gather in and around the Old City of Lahore. To the unassuming eye they are just enjoying a leisurely night out. But those frequenting the same haunts know by their signals and mannerisms that many of them are waiting at specific spots to be picked up by men for sex.

Resting against the grille encircling a merry-go-round in Karim Park, by the Minar-i-Pakistan, a 60 metre-high monument to independence, a teenage boy looks around. He is dressed in traditional shalwar-kameez, loose trousers and a long shirt, with a thick shawl thrown casually around his shoulders. Despite a drop in temperature the park is crowded and people are sitting on benches sipping hot tea, munching peanuts or eating nan halim.

The boy against the grille speaks to no one until a smartly dressed man in tightly fitting blue jeans and a black pullover approaches him. Within seconds another older man appears from nowhere and places his arm around the boy. He says something to the young man in blue jeans who turns to leave.

Salman Malik, Community Project Officer for the government of the Punjab and also for Pehchaan, a Lahore-based non-governmental organisation, confirms that the young boy comes here regularly to pick up clients and had been approached for sex. "His 'nrntector' runs a tea stall behind the Lahore Fort, where the boy also works as an errand boy," says Malik. "At night the boy is taken to the Minar-i-Pakistan to attract men. His protector probably didn't trust the man in jeans."

Malik has been working with abused and sexually exploited boys for nearly two years and is currently involved in a project for the government of the Punjab to monitor child sex workers for HIV infection. "In my experience nearly every child you see working on the streets of Lahore is sexually abused, with the majority involved in sex work," he says.

The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a global problem. While the exploitation of girls is well documented and there is often support available for them, little research has been done on young boys in the sex trade. Instead their situation tends to go unrecognised, is treated with less gravity or is presumed to be associated only with tourists.

Shehar Banu Khan, Lahore

PAKISTAN PARTITIONED

The statement by Mr. Rahul Gandhi, implying that Indira Gandhi divided Pakistan, is a very superficial way of understanding the complex phenomenon of division of Pakistan. The real cause of creation of Bangla Desh lies in failure of "religion as the basis of Nation state". India was partitioned mainly due to British Policy of Divide and rule and the complicity of Muslim and Hindu communal streams. Pakistan came into being on the basis of Islam and India on secular grounds. In Pakistan the Mullah-Military coterie came to dominate the scene and dominant sections of West Pakistan started economic exploitation of East Pakistan. This was followed by the imposition of Urdu as National Language and later Mujib Ur Rehman, who got the majority in elections, was denied the Prime ministership. This strengthened separatist movement in East Pakistan.. Pakistani army repressed the East Pakistani, innumerable atrocities were committed and that gave the impetus to Mukti Bahini. While outside factors (Indira Gandhi, Indian army) did play their own role the main cause of divisions of country lies within. Creation of Bangla Desh was also the graveyard of the Two Nation theory, which was propounded by Savarkar on one side, Hindus are a Nation, and Muslim League, and Muslims are a separate nation.

Ram Puniyani
All India Secular Forum

TARGETING AFRICA

China's President Hu Jintao has gone on a second Africa trip within a year, heralding a new round in Beijing's charm offensive. Before setting off on an eight-nation tour in February, Hu promised Africa another \$3 billion in fresh loans on preferential terms. China also wants to double its aid and interest-free loans over the next three years. There is just one condition: access to commodities China urgently needs. Most of the time, Beijing is proposing comprehensive projects for infrastructures, including funding, delivery and training of staff. These projects often only cost a fraction of what European companies would charge.

'Old' donors are watching China's action with suspicion. They accuse China to free-ride on the development efforts deployed by the international community. Poor African countries are only largely debt-free today because of two multilateral debt relief programmes. Some of the countries that benefited most have recently begun anew to incur massive debts, with China their most important creditor. While the terms of China's loans are not well known, their rapid rise and characteristics (such as contingency and foreign-exchange clauses) may impair debt sustainability in low-income countries.

Furthermore, critics say, Beijing does not shy away from places where dictatorship and corruption prevail, supporting regimes the West decided not to cooperate with. It is further stated that the People's Republic is not interested in sustainable development for Africa, but rather only wants to secure access to commodities, without any concern for social or environmental standards.

China's loans are making it more difficult for Western donors to influence African policy-making in economic affairs. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are facing the same challenge. The competition now faced by Western financial institutions may strengthen the competition across economic-policy paradigms, with recipient countries free to choose. Ultimately, reform ownership and accountability may thus be strengthened. As power slips away from the old donor cartel, new opportunities for real competition between different policy-approaches will arise.

H Reiseu, Paris