



DAKAR: This file photo taken on April 15, 2016 shows a young Senegalese boy, locally called talibe, begs for ailments in a street in Dakar on April 15, 2016. — AP

SENEGAL AUTHORITIES SWEEP CHILD BEGGARS OFF STREETS

DAKAR: In recent weeks, packs of shoeless boys and girls have been coaxed off the streets where they have spent their childhoods, crying and frightened as they are loaded onto buses in the Senegalese capital Dakar. The crackdown on child begging comes after years of inaction and is praised by children's groups but greeted with anger by powerful Islamic figures in the West African nation.

The children are from a mix of poor or homeless families and others known as "talibes"-boys sent out to beg by Islamic tutors to make money for their boarding schools. They are brought to Guinddi Children's Centre in the capital accompanied by social workers, where they are interviewed and checked for signs of maltreatment and disease. "The children are generally unaccompanied. When they come here we ask them for the telephone number of their tutor or Koranic teacher and they give it to us," explained Maimouna Balde, director of the Guinddi centre.

Parents, or Islamic teachers known as "marabouts", will generally come and pick up the children themselves, Balde said, whereupon the centre's staff explain that if their charges are found on the streets again they will be prosecuted. The operation will continue "for as long as there are children on the streets," she said.

Profitable system

With 270 street kids picked up in the first two weeks of July in Dakar, according to the authorities, the initiative is a long way from dealing with the 30,000 talibes estimated to be begging daily. Often from poor rural families, the talibes are sent to Dakar and other Senegalese cities nominally to memorise the Koran, but are often left vulnerable to abuse and receiving little education. Sometimes the journey home is long: on July 11 nine children were repatriated to neighboring Guinea after being collected from the streets, according to one Guinean charity.

The current crackdown is the first time a decade-old law has been firmly applied, with parents or guardians of child beggars potentially facing two to five years in jail and fines of up to 2,000,000 CFA (\$3,355). "There are fattened calves hidden behind

this education system to exploit children through begging, which is an easy and profitable business," Niokhobaye Diouf, national director of child protection services.

Parents of street children should be assessed to see if they could benefit from state welfare and health programs to deter them from relying on their children's labor, he said. Talibes are told to beg for food and money and not to return to their "daara"-Islamic school-until they have collected enough. Even late at night in Dakar children only visibly out of kindergarten can be seen shaking empty tins of food, trying to get enough to be allowed to finish up for the day.

Power of tradition

Dealing with the systematic slavery of children in Senegal in this way has been attempted and then abandoned by the state several times before. Until now, the power of tradition means few have been willing to challenge the marabouts, given their status and the respect they are afforded as Islamic scholars. Muslim elder Sidi Lamine Niassé told journalists the government "doggedly pursued daaras" to "stigmatize and demonize" them.

But the schools have a long history of abuse: in February, the Senegalese authorities found 20 boys aged between six and 14 kept in chains by their marabout-resulting in a rare prosecution. Mustapha Lo, president of the national federation of Koranic schools, said the street sweep was taken without consulting Muslim educators and downplayed the concerns relayed by children's charities.

"The majority of us manage our Koranic schools without making the children beg on the streets. Some Koranic teachers do that because they lack any other financial means," Lo said.

Countering their arguments, Diouf said the government hopes to reform the daaras' curriculum while giving them a better level of financial support. More than their education is at stake: the authorities want to avoid children falling prey to jihadist recruiters in the region, who are luring young men away with promises of riches and glory. — AFP

INDIA WIDENS SEARCH FOR MISSING MILITARY PLANE

CHENNAI: India yesterday stepped up a major search operation for an air force plane that disappeared over the Bay of Bengal the day before with 29 people on board, as the defense minister headed to the region. The AN-32 military transport plane was on a routine flight from the southern city of Chennai to Port Blair, capital of the remote Andaman and Nicobar islands, on Friday morning when it vanished from radar screens.

Twenty-one of the passengers on board were defense personnel, including six crew members, while eight others worked for the military in non-uniform roles, an IAF source told AFP. On its official Twitter account the Indian navy said 18 navy and coastguard ships were now deployed in the search operation, along with six aircraft and a submarine. "#SAROps 18 Naval & ICG ships (+15m) deployed with various aircraft... to locate missing AN 32" the navy tweeted.

Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar travelled to Tambaram air base on the outskirts of Chennai yesterday morning, where he was briefed by military officials before departing for an aerial survey to monitor the ongoing operation.

"It lost contact with the radars approximately 150 nautical miles east of Chennai," IAF Wing Commander Anupam Banerjee told AFP. Several reports said weather in the Bay of Bengal had been rough owing to the southwest monsoon.

An IAF source said Friday radar data from the missing aircraft showed it making a sharp left turn before rapidly losing altitude. The Russian-built AN-32, equipped with navigational aids, is the IAF's workhorse aircraft and capable of flying for up to four hours without refueling. Experts have warned India's outdated fleet-some of which dates back to the 1960s-is a threat to national security, with some aircraft virtually on their last legs. — AFP

KASHMIR RESIDENTS STRUGGLE UNDER SECURITY LOCKDOWN

SHOPS ARE SHUTTERED, PUBLIC MOVEMENT RESTRICTED

SRINAGAR: Sheikh Naseer Ahmed is getting married, yet his home looks like anyone else's. There are no floral or light decorations, no hustle and bustle. Only close relatives are invited to the modest meal that is being prepared. His unusually humble nuptials reflect how ordinary life is muted in Srinagar, the urban heart of Indian-controlled Kashmir, as authorities attempt to quash protests against Indian rule. An eerie silence engulfs downtown, home to half a million people. Shortly after dawn, police and paramilitary soldiers, in full riot gear and armed with automatic rifles, swiftly occupy the roads and streets. They set up checkpoints, and lay steel barricades and razor wire at all the entry and exit points.

Like much of the rest of Kashmir, the sprawling, densely populated neighborhoods have been under curfew since July 9, a day after Indian government forces killed a popular leader of the region's largest rebel group. Yet public defiance has persisted, sparking deadly clashes between Kashmiris and Indian government forces that left dozens dead and hundreds injured. Separatist leaders have called general strikes. Shops are shuttered and public movement restricted. Getting food and medicine is a struggle. Dozens of feasts and celebrations have been canceled.

Curfew wedding

Ahmed's marriage date was fixed months back, with elaborate celebration plans. He intended to have more than 500 guests fed by 20 chefs cooking more than 500 kilograms of mutton and chicken for the multi-course Kashmiri meal known as wazwan. A principal part of Kashmiri marriage, the wazwan consists of seven to 20 dishes, and is accompanied by a religious ritual solemnizing the nuptial khatta. Those invitations, as well as mutton and chicken orders, have been canceled. The atmosphere is quite subdued. About two dozen women circled inside a hall to sing few traditional folk songs.

"How can we feast and celebrate when so many people are being killed?" Ahmed said in downtown neighborhood of Nowhatta, which houses the city's historic main mosque of Jamia Masjid. "I'm just managing to solemnize my nuptial knot." At a nearby community hall, few hundred meters away from Ahmed's modest three-story house, there are just two chefs at an open-air kitchen cooking 30 kilograms of mutton. The meal will be an ordinary, single meat dish and a vegetable. "The entire population is undergoing a grind," said Mohammed Munnawar, the head

chef. "It feels sinful to pound and grind meat for rista" or minced mutton balls. "This is a peak marriage season here. But this how we've been doing it in these conditions," Munnawar said.

After the Thursday's wazwan, Ahmed, accompanied by four relatives, traveled 5 kilometers (3 miles) to another neighborhood in Srinagar to bring his bride home late Thursday night, after government troops had withdrawn from the pitch-dark streets. Under normal circumstances, the feasting would continue after the bride has

stop activists from organizing protests. Life may be toughest for the sick.

Suffer the little children

Not far from Ahmed, cancer patient Haleema Bano twice ran short of her medicine, but managed to get it. Now, however, she's due for her follow-up examinations. To get to the hospital, she will need her son's help to walk a long distance, through a network of interior alleys away from police and paramilitary soldiers. She's fearful. "I don't know how long this will go

between the archivals. The Indian side has seen several separatist movements since then, including a bloody armed rebellion launched in 1989 to demand independence or a merger with Pakistan. More than 68,000 people were killed in that uprising and the subsequent brutal military crackdown by hundreds of thousands of Indian forces deployed across the region. But the latest rage surprised authorities, who did not expect rebel killings to be a trigger for a renewed public insurrection. The state administration has so far done little more than



SRINAGAR: An Indian Paramilitary soldier stops a Kashmiri Muslim man. — AP

been brought home, but this, as Ahmed said, was a "curfewed marriage." Restrictions and security lockdowns are nothing new for Kashmiris. The region witnessed months of clampdown during massive public uprisings against Indian rule in 2008 and 2010. Frequent separatist calls for shutdown and protests too are routinely met with security lockdowns. Residents say they've figured out ways to mitigate the hardships of being prisoners inside their homes.

For fresh vegetables and milk, they must leave home before dawn and walk a few kilometers to reach farmers; they can be home by 6 a.m. They buy other essentials, and smokers can get cigarettes, at the home of a neighborhood grocery store owner who had stockpiled goods there. But communication and information blackout has added to the hardships. Authorities suspended most cellular and internet services and temporarily banned newspaper publication to

Von," said Bano as she wiped sweat from her 3-year-old granddaughter, sleeping next to her. "I don't want my son to be in harm's way." Her son, Reyaz Ahmed Bhat, said a cousin in a neighboring locality ran out of prescription medicine for chronic depression. Living on a roadside in the gaze of patrolling soldiers, his condition worsened as he could not even venture out of his home to take strolls.

"Sometimes he would become violent, hitting his head against the wall. Then he would go quiet for hours. His wife and parents and two little kids were so terrified," Bhat said. "For three days he and his family suffered before his medicine could be organized." Kashmir's fury at Indian rule is not something new. Its roots lie in a broken promise of referendum guaranteed shortly after India and Pakistan gained independence from Britain. The two countries were unable to resolve their competing claims on the stunning mountain territory divided

let the police and paramilitary quell the deadly unrest. Yet every new killing has further enraged residents, sparking more protests and clashes. Separatist politicians, most of them under house arrest or inside police lockups, have channeled the uprising by repeatedly calling for protest demonstrations and strikes.

On Wednesday night, separatist politicians appealed to residents to stock up for a long struggle. The strike was relaxed Thursday and resumed Friday. Earlier in the week at sunset, as soldiers in Nowhatta began to withdraw for the day, a group mostly of young men barged them with stones and bricks. Soldiers responded with pepper gas and, tear gas, and threw stones as well. The muezzin call for evening prayer from the nearby mosque established a sort of ceasefire. Both sides withdrew. The next day is the same routine: Soldiers patrolling silent, deserted streets, and residents caged in their homes. — AP

INDIAN CHARITY WORKER RESCUED IN AFGHANISTAN

KABUL: An Indian charity worker kidnapped from Kabul has been rescued, officials said yesterday, more than a month after she was taken at gunpoint in the latest abduction of foreigners

in the war-torn country. Judith D'Souza, a 40-year-old staff member of the Aga Khan Foundation, a prominent NGO that has long worked in Afghanistan, was abducted near her

residence in the heart of Kabul on the night of June 9.

"I am happy to inform you that Judith D'Souza has been rescued," India's Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj said on Twitter. "D'Souza is with us safe and in good spirits... I have spoken to Judith. She is reaching Delhi this evening." An Afghan security official told AFP that D'Souza was rescued in an operation in a district of Kabul on Friday and no ransom was paid. He added that a criminal gang, and not militants, were behind the abduction, which had prompted desperate pleas from D'Souza's family to Indian officials on social media.

"Judith has been rescued by the Government. Our family's joy knows no bounds. Gratitude to (the Indian government)," Jerome D'Souza, a family member, said on Twitter yesterday. D'Souza's abduction came after Katherine Jane Wilson, a well-known Australian NGO worker, was kidnapped on April 28 in the city of Jalalabad, close to the border with Pakistan. Wilson, said to be aged 60, ran an organization known as Zardozi, which promotes the work of Afghan artisans, particularly women.

The United States warned its citizens in Afghanistan in May of a "very high" kidnapping risk after an American citizen narrowly escaped abduction in the heart of Kabul. Aid workers in particular have increasingly been casualties of a surge in militant violence in recent years. In April last year the bullet-riddled bodies of five Afghan workers for Save the Children were found after they were abducted by gunmen in the strife-torn southern province of Uruzgan. — AFP



NEW DELHI: Judith D'Souza, an Indian charity worker kidnapped in Kabul last month, walks out of the airport as she returns to India upon her release. — AP

FIVE YOUNG INDIANS DIE IN SUSPECTED 'HONOR' KILLINGS

NEW DELHI: Five young people in northern India are believed to have been murdered by their families or partner's relatives in suspected honor killings, in three separate incidents this week, police said yesterday. Police arrested the father and brother of a 19-year-old Hindu woman Friday on suspicion of murdering her and her 23-year-old lover, both from the lowest Dalit caste. The relatives allegedly strangled the couple after catching them having sex at their home in Shamli district in Uttar Pradesh state, police said.

"We have arrested the father and brother of the girl. They told us they

killed them because she had brought disrepute to the family," Bhusan Verma, investigating officer in Shamli, told AFP. "We are investigating to see if there were more relatives involved. Both were strangled to death." It came after another Hindu couple in their 20s were Thursday found dead in nearby Saharanpur district, also in Uttar Pradesh, after their families allegedly objected to their relationship. Police have not ruled out suicide after the couple were found hanging inside the man's house. "It could be honor killing or suicide. We are waiting for the post

mortem reports to confirm the cause of death," Pradeep Kumar Yadav, police chief of Saharanpur, told AFP.

Yadav said the couple were in a three year relationship and wanted to marry but faced resistance from both families. Both of the deceased couples were biologically unrelated to one another. However, in each case, the couples belonged to the same "gotra"-or kinship group-something considered incestuous by many Hindus despite the lack of biological links, and which can be a cause for such killings.

In a third case, police on Thursday

found the body of a 16-year-old Muslim boy buried near an edible oil factory in neighboring Muzaffarnagar district, after he earlier went missing from his home. Police said the teenager was in a relationship with the niece of the factory's Hindu owner, adding her relatives strangled him to protect the "honor of the family".

"We have arrested the girl's brother, uncle and cousin for the murder," Deepak Kumar, police chief of Muzaffarnagar district, told AFP. Marriages outside one's caste or religion still attract censure across India.

Honor killings-which often see couples targeted because their families or communities disapprove of their relationship-have been carried out for centuries in the country, especially in rural areas. They are typically enacted by close relatives or village elders to protect what is seen as the family's reputation in a hereditary caste system. United Nations statistics suggest 1,000 out of the 5,000 such murders that occur worldwide every year are in India. India's Supreme Court ruled in 2011 that those found guilty of the killings should face the death penalty. — AFP