

AFGHANISTAN

Talibs In Afghanistan Let Women Die In Childbirth

Original sources: The Guardian, UK newspaper; De Volkskrant, Feb 2, 1995; Haagse Courant, Dutch newspaper, April 8, 1995; reprinted in the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights Newsletter 49, Jan - Mar 1995.

Talibs in Afghanistan (Islamic teachers and their students) now control large parts of the country including four or five provinces.

While many people may feel safe and at peace with the talibs in power, others fear the country will be controlled by a severe regime with little respect for women's rights. Already, in the areas

controlled by the talibs, girls have been banned from school, female teachers have been fired, and school directors are being advised to restyle the curriculums in order to re-establish the madrassahs, religious colleges.

The talibs canceled all training for midwives, contending that women should not work. Furthermore, they urge male doctors to deny any treatment to their female patients; in a city like Kandahar, many women die in childbirth.

Other restrictions that have been recently imposed on women include sanctions on going out alone; they should be accompanied by a man, and even then, they should be veiled. Women who challenged those restrictions have been known to be tortured by fanatic talibs. Just before going to print, the latest news that reached us suggests that the restrictions for women going out have been relaxed; provided that they wear a burqa (which covers the head and the whole body, leaving only some holes to look through at eye level), they are allowed on the streets again. Also, nurses and midwives are allowed to work again in the hospitals.

CHINA

Female Farmers 'Key To Nation's Growth'

Source: Associated Press, South China Morning Post, June 24, 1995.

Female farmers are the key to China's economic development because they produce between 50 and 60 percent of the food their countrymen eat, according to a study released yesterday by the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

"China's remarkable economic progress has been both a cause and a result of the increased empowerment of rural women," it said. In the future, women living in rural areas would produce a greater proportion of the food because they were becoming better integrated into the country's economy and men were going to work in cities, fund president Fawzi Al-Sultan said.

But rural women still faced discrimination and a large proportion of them lived in poverty, he said. Despite improved education, laws affirming women's equality and the government's efforts to alleviate poverty only 48 percent of rural women can read and most cannot borrow money to put into rural businesses, the study said.

Rural women worked an average 11.35 hours a day compared with 10.06 hours for their male counterparts.

The report called for an expansion of training programmes for women, particularly in remote impoverished areas, greater access to credit, including direct loans to women, and implementation of laws ensuring equality of the sexes. Beijing co-operated with the Rome-based fund in preparing the 131-page report, "The Status of Rural Women in China", which was released in London. The fund is a development agency affiliated with the United Nations.

Mr Al-Sultan said the study was one of the most extensive international surveys of women living in the countryside in the developing world. "Especially during the past decade and a half, the social, political and economic status of rural women in China has undergone dramatic improvement," it said. "However, long-ingrained ideas and practices do not vanish overnight, despite laws, and Chinese women -- in particular rural women -- still have a long way to go before they are, in fact, treated as equals of men."

Amnesty Caims Abuse Of Women In China

Source: South China Morning Post; June 28, 1995.

Chinese women who express dissenting views face harassment, imprisonment and sometimes torture, says a report released on June 27 by Amnesty International. The 27-page report, titled Women in China: Imprisoned and Abused for Dissent, was timed to draw attention to human rights abuses in the host nation for the United Nations World Conference on Women. The report concludes that dissidents in China who are women face the same harsh treatment their male counterparts receive.

Women also suffer rights abuses associated with China's compulsory birth control policy, including forced abortions. Women "continue to suffer human rights violations for activities which are considered entirely legitimate and central to the work of NGOs across the world," the report said. They have been jailed for participating in demonstrations or discussing issues that would be the subject of public debate in other countries. Women who have criticised the Government or pursued the release of detained relatives have been harassed and detained, it said.

Among the women mentioned in the report is Ding Zilin, a professor who has asked the Government for a full account of the June 4, 1989, violent suppression of the pro-democracy protests in Beijing. Her son was killed in the crackdown. She and her husband, Jiang Peikun, have been under almost constant police surveillance, and both lost academic positions and part of their salaries.

The report also gave examples of torture including beatings and electric shocks.

Fiji

Fijian Women Organize Around Rape

Source: Kinesis; March 1995.

Fiji women's groups are outraged by the repeated lack of convictions for rapists, and are organizing to raise awareness of the sexism of the judicial system.

In a recent court trial in Labasa's Magistrate Court, six men, who admitted to having raped a 15-year-old girl, were let-off because the Magistrate said the "well-built" girl appeared to look older than her age. In his sentencing remarks, the Magistrate suggested that because the victim looked as if she were

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the age of consent (17), she may have consented to having sex with all the men. Authorities are reconsidering whether to file an appeal.

In another case, a Chief Justice in Suva was criticised by women's groups for saying that, because of a teenager's previous sexual experience, her rape at knifepoint would have no adverse effect on the victim. In yet another case, in Nadi, a magistrate passed a lenient sentence against a rapist because the woman he raped was drunk and asleep when he attacked her.

GERMANY

Supply Cannot Meet Demand For Women In Reunified Germany

by Roby Alampay
Source: Today, June 12, 1995

"Did you buy your wife?"

Elnora Held, a Filipina in Berlin and the wife in question, couldn't believe what she was hearing. It wasn't so much the query as how it was asked. She and her husband, a German, were at a dinner party when Mr. Held's friend approached. He asked "so coolly, matter-of-factly" with "no malice at all." Small talk and nothing more. I knew that many Germans had this attitude toward Filipino and Asian women, but when it was asked right in front of me, I was dumbfounded."

A new study released by Ban Ying (Thai for "House of Women"), a nongovernment organization, documents the plight of Filipino, Thai and former Eastern bloc immigrants, lured, brought or bought from their native lands as mail-order brides, or hired to work Berlin's cobblestone streets as prostitutes.

Sigrund Katins, Elnora's co-staffer in Ban Ying, discusses their paper *The Trade in Women in Berlin* --- a first attempt to document the problem.

The market in women has existed for years, in cities all over Germany, all over Europe and the Western world, Katins begins.

Thais and Filipinas, singled out -- in that order -- from all other Third World women have been among the primary "goods." Poverty at home or at least just the promise of a better life abroad had lured them to Germany. Invariably, many ended up as wives to divorced or middle-aged German bachelors, or as prostitutes. Either way, many risked -- and found -- trouble.

"Everybody knows that many Filipinas here are being abused, kept prisoner by their own husbands," Elnora says. Ban Ying receives around five walk-in

Filipinas and Thais a month in an undisclosed center for abused women in Berlin. "They found out about our center by word of mouth, usually. Filipina friends or even friends of their husbands tell them about us or us about them," Elnora says. "Now we're coming out with posters -- in Thai and Filipino -- to try to reach more women who may need our help."

Ban Ying offers counselling and legal services. The most important task now for the organization is to document a phenomenon that in many ways is still not acknowledged by the German legal system. Ban Ying laments the lack of hard data on the plight of women in Berlin. In mid-1994, it only knew that 3,799 Thai and 621 Filipino women were registered -- as tourists -- with the police in Berlin. Authorities would only acknowledge that "the actual number (of trafficked women) must be much higher" because "the estimated number of unknown cases is very high."

Beyond defining the market, though, Ban Ying notes with alarm an apparent expansion of this network of exploitation -- a rise that ironically corresponded with Berlin's own rebirth and liberation.

"After 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the markets for everything expanded," Katins said. Former East Germans, deprived of political and economic choices for an entire generation, wanted a taste of all the forbidden fruits the West had to offer, and provided room for expansion.

"I shudder when we speak in these terms," Elnora says. In this harsh reality, after all, the same forces affecting car sales are the same factors at play in the exploitation of women. "But I know that it's unavoidable, discussing 'the market.' It's the only way to understand the problem."

HONG KONG

Source: Hong Kong Standard Vol. II, nos. 3 & 4, July - Dec 1994.

Nepalese Domestics Trapped In Sex Racket In Hong Kong

Up to 50 women from Nepal are being forced to provide cheap sex to their countrymen and Indians in Hong Kong. A spokeswoman for the Joint Action Network for Nepal (Jann), Sujita Shakya, told the Hong Kong Standard that a number of the 600 Nepalese women recruited by Hong Kong-based recruitment agencies as domestic helpers and sales girls allegedly ended up working as prostitutes in the territory.

The trafficking of Nepalese women started about four years ago because of

the growing demand for cheap sex in the territory.

Today, Hong Kong is the second biggest market for Nepalese victims of sex trafficking. The bulk of Nepalese victims - estimated at 100,000 are in India.

Mainland Women Tricked Into Working As Domestics

Rural mainland Chinese women are being forced to work as domestic helpers in Hong Kong in spite of their having applied for non-domestic jobs. Chinese maids, who are often aged over 50, do not usually complain about their illegal work because they receive a higher salary than foreign domestic helpers. Because they can communicate better with their employers, their salaries are comparatively high, ranging from \$5,000 to \$8,000 a month.

Jump In Number Of Indonesian Domestic Helpers In Hong Kong

Indonesian domestic helpers already outnumber Thais, but Filipinas are still the favorite amahs. According to the Immigration Department, the total number of Indonesian maids reached 9,000 at the end of August. Indonesians form the second biggest group of foreign maids after Filipinos, who account for 115,000 of the 130,000 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong. Thais, formerly the second biggest group of foreign domestic helpers, have remained at 7,000. At the end of 1993, the number of Indonesians was 6,000, while there were still about 7,000 Thai maids. In 1993, the number of Filipina maids was 105,000 out of the 120,000 foreign maids registered. The director of the Asian Migrant Centre attributed the rise in the number of Indonesian maids to aggressive promotion by recruitment agencies. "Agencies have been promoting Indonesian maids as cheap and hard working," she said. Many Indonesian maids were paid only (HK) \$1,500 a month, while the minimum wage up to September was \$3,500. A higher minimum wage of \$3,750 took effect at the start of this month.

INDONESIA

OPEN WOUND, Labour activist's murder haunts military

by John McBeth in Surabaya, Indo.
Source: Far Eastern Economic Review,
June 22, 1995.

Last year, lawyer Trimoelya Soeryadi asked two army colonels if they could arrange for him to meet their boss, East Java's regional commander. Trimoelya, defending one of eight people accused of murdering Marsinah, a 25-year-old labour activist, had publicly claimed she died in army custody. Now, he told the officers, he wanted to assure their general that he wasn't anti-military.

Days later, the officers told him they couldn't pass on his request. If they did, they said, they would be investigated for having contacts with the Surabaya-based lawyer. "Imagine it, two colonels, and they were too worried about their careers to do even that," Trimoelya marvels. "The bad thing about Indonesia is this all-pervasive fear -- fear to do this, fear to do that."

Police have now reopened the investigation into Marsinah's abduction and murder in May 1993. More than any other case, the brutal death of the lowly watch-factory worker has focused international attention on the plight of Indonesian labour, on the military's often heavy-handed intervention in strikes -- and on the methods that are routinely used to extract confessions. The case has its beginnings on May 3, 1993, when workers at Sidoarjo Catur Putra Surya watch factory went on strike, demanding payment of the minimum wage and dissolution of the local unit of the government-controlled labour union. The strike was settled the following day in talks between labour leaders, including Marsinah, the management and government and army representatives.

Although one of the conditions of the settlement was that the strikers would not be penalized, army officers summoned 13 male workers to the military district command on May 5 and forced them to sign letters stating they were "voluntarily" resigning from the company. Angry over the way the military had gone back on its word, Marsinah went to complain.

Trimoelya says newly-appointed regional commander Maj.-Gen. Imam Utomo has acknowledged that Marsinah was at the district headquarters until 9 p.m. on May 5. What happened to her after that remains a mystery. Three days later, her body was found lying on a roadside

200 kilometers from where she disappeared. A post mortem indicated she had died as a result of injuries inflicted during torture, including having a sharp object shoved into her vagina. Despite widespread coverage in the Indonesian press, the investigation languished for more than six months. Then on October 1, the factory's owner, Judi Susanto, seven civilian employees and Porong sub-district military chief Capt. Kusaeri were detained. Having been taken from their homes without arrest warrants, they were held incommunicado for 18 days at the 5th Division military headquarters in Surabaya.

The defendants later claimed in court testimony they were tortured into admitting their involvement in a murder conspiracy. Susanto says he was given electric shocks, burned with cigarette butts, ordered to mop the floor with his tongue and forced to eat his own vomit. On October 19-20, the defendants were moved to the provincial police headquarters and formally charged with killing Marsinah.

In subsequent trials, during which the defendants recanted their alleged confessions, Susanto was sentenced to 17 years imprisonment and the others to terms ranging from seven months to 13 years. The Supreme Court decision quashed the convictions. The military now says it will also exonerate the army captain, who has served a nine-month sentence for allegedly failing to report his knowledge of an impending crime.

"There are two aspects to this case, a cover-up and a frame-up," says Trimoelya, who also figured in the recent successful legal action against the government's closure of the newsweekly Tempo. "But where I think the military very wrong is that it tried to frame not one person, but nine people. Why involve many? In a conspiracy like this, you think the fewer people who know about it the better."

The state-appointed commission which has drawn high praise for the independence it has shown in some controversial cases, later declared the wrong people were on trial and the real culprits were still at large. It said there were indications that torture had been used to extract confessions. The report was largely ignored and the trial went ahead.

KOREA

Korea Approves Ordination Of Women

by Obk In Kim and Wbaja Hwang, National Organization of Korean Presbyterian Women
Source: Decade Link no. 16, March 1995

The 79th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) has voted to ordain women to the office of elder and pastor. The final tally showed 701 commissioners in favour of ordination and 612 against.

Now, the amendment must be approved by two-thirds of the 51 presbyteries in the PCK. To win approval in the presbytery, the amendment must be passed by a two-thirds majority. "We ask for your prayers as we work toward this goal and toward the date when women will be recognized as full partners in ministry in the denomination. The simple recording of a vote can't reflect the deep meaning this movement of God's spirit has for us. As we celebrate the Assembly's action, we acknowledge, with gratitude, the countless generations of Korean women who were and are builders of the church in their country. We give thanks for this "cloud of witnesses", for their courage and vision and faithfulness to the Gospel in the midst of tremendous struggle."

MALAYSIA

Malaysia For Domestic Violence Bill

Source: The Women's Tribune Watch, vol. 8, no. 2, 1994; appeared again in Decade Link No. 16, March 1995

The Malaysian parliament has moved one step closer to the passage of a domestic violence bill. While the Joint Action Group on Violence Against Women (JAG) welcomed the parliament's consideration of such a bill, they hope next year's version will include several key positions omitted in the current version. JAG believes any legislation should include the definition of domestic violence as a specific crime; provision of victim/survivor assistance; the separation of protection orders from criminal proceedings; inclusion of compulsory counselling for the abuser; and specific police procedures on the handling of domestic violence cases. JAG has actively lobbied for the enactment of the Domestic Violence Bill for eight years.

MAORI

Maori Women And Fisheries

by Nikki Searancke-Ngati Porou
Source: Greenpeace New Zealand, Green Women's Network Newsletter no. 3, Autumn 1995

Nikki's research into the role of Maori women in traditional fisheries management has raised some critical political issues. Although her focus has been on traditional knowledge, the women she has spoken with are very aware of intellectual property rights aspects of the issues and of the realities of use and development of fisheries. For the traditional kafdaki (guardians) of a resource it has become dangerous to reveal too much.

Knowledge is a taonga which must be treasured and protected as much the kaimoana itself. When asked for details some will say "that's my business" meaning that they are protecting traditional knowledge. The example of kina shows the joint venture between iwi and the Japanese had some initial success in harvesting the readily accessible kina but Maori people are now struggling with issues of traditional guardianship and control of the resource. Maori coastal hapu are setting bottom lines and defining boundaries which in essence protect their traditional kina beds and maintain the mana and control of the hapu itself. Maori women or indeed their hapu on the coast, do not reject use and management of fisheries, but this must evolve from a process of consideration by the traditional owners including women as resource managers. Gatherers of kai for centuries, Maori women must have a voice in the fisheries access and sustainability debates. For Nikki, her work on past fisheries leads into the future.

PAKISTAN

PAWLA Produces Legal Literacy Films For Women

Source: Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies, Vol. 1 Number 2, 1995 Karachi-Pakistan.

The literacy rate among women of Pakistan is very low and legal literacy is practically non-existent even amongst literate women. To combat this the Pakistan Women Lawyer's Association (PAWLA), has produced six video films on different legal issues. These films namely Rishta Ilzam, (Accusation), Warasat, (Inheritance), Dastak, (knock at the Door) were prepared by Ms. Rashida Mohammed Hussain Patel, President PAWLA. She has taken each

topic based on the cases which came before the Legal Aid Centre of PAWLA. For out reach areas, PAWLA has a Mobile van which is equipped with a television set and V.C.R. Seminars follow the film showing. A woman law officer accompanies the Mobile Van to give legal advice to the women.

Rishta (Marriage contract) is the first film produced by PAWLA, is Rishta. This film concerns, Talaq (divorce) by a husband. PAWLA considers that the unilateral "Talaq" by the husband is one of the major problems creating hardship and misery for the wife and children. Aurat Ki Awaz (Woman's Voice) concerns the cases of women who seek divorce. The film creates awareness among women about their rights and the procedure for getting divorce through courts of law.

PHILIPPINES

Girls Added To 3 Gs In Isabela

By: D. Gorecho
Source: TODAY April 25, 1995.

Politicians in Isabela province in the Philippines have expanded the three "Gs" - guns, goons and gold of Philippine politics to win votes. They added girls to the list. Sources said local beerhouses were often short of guest relation officers' because politicians were treating barangay officials, their ward leaders and supporters to a good time in girlie bars from the start of the election campaign until elections were held in May. "They [politicians] bring them to sing-along bars and disco houses to keep them in their political camps or make an impression," said a source, who did not want to be named. "In a sense, wooing them". One mayoral candidate was said to have taken with him at least 40 men, mostly barangay officials, to a local night, club where an estimated 60 girls work, including a 14-year-old. Most of the girls came from Manila after nightclubs in Ermita were ordered closed by Mayor Alfredo Lim. Others came from rural areas of Bicol and Samar. "I went straight to this town without seeing what Manila looks like," said 19-year-old Glenda, a Bicolana. She said she couldn't tell if her customer is a politician's guest or not but emphasized that the club manager often warned the girls to be cautious with the men from neighboring Quirino province. Men from Quirino have gained notoriety among club owners for prodding the girls to escape; the latest such incident happened in March.

SOUTH AFRICA

Women And South Africa: SPEAK Speaks No More

by Fatima Jaffer
Source: Kinesis March 1995; #301-1720 Grant Street, Vancouver, BC USA 246; Tel: (604) 255-5499; Fax: (604) 255-5511

Speak, the most widely read and one of only two national feminist publications in South Africa, has ceased publication of its monthly magazine and closed down its radio project.

The decision to discontinue Speak operations was made early this year after most of the skilled personnel at Speak resigned for newly available jobs in the mainstream media, following the first multiracial, non-apartheid elections in South Africa last April.

Speak was founded in 1982 at a time of great proliferation of civic, anti-apartheid organizations. The women who formed Speak, like others in the Left, saw a need to link the struggles of peoples in local communities to the broader national struggles taking place. But history had shown that even while women are the driving forces of liberation movements, the issue of women's equality is sidetracked once revolutions are won. And so the women at Speak decided to ensure women's liberation would be an integral part of the national liberation right at the start. Speak became an organizing tool for women.

ISIS thanks all the women who produced SPEAK over the years. We will miss your voices and the magazine as a source of news and knowledge about women in South Africa.

TAIWAN

Taiwan: Married Women Stand Up

Source: Taiwan Industrial Relations Bulletin no. 28, April 10, 1995.

On 2nd of March, 1995, members of the Women's Solidarity Alliance demonstrated at the freeway toll station, south of Taipei, against the Freeway Bureau's ban on employing married women. The bureau requires its women toll collectors to remain single as it would be inconvenient for married employees to do the night and overnight shifts. The poster of one demonstrator says: "I am married. I want to apply for a job. I protest the decision to deprive married women of their rights to work." There has been growing advocacy from workers' groups and women activists against companies imposing the regulations to dismiss female workers after marriage. They stressed the regulations are unfair and a kind of discrimination.