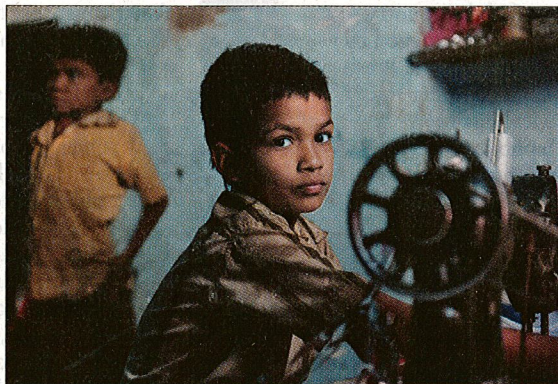


## India: Where 6-year-olds can work legally

India is backsliding on child labor, said Rikke Nöhrhnd and Gerard Oonk in *The Guardian* (U.K.). The government was supposed to pass a law last week that would have outlawed all employment of children under 14, but instead it added a wide array of exceptions that “will push millions of children into work rather than education.” Under the old law, children ages 6 to 14 were banned from “hazardous” industries but could still work in many factories or as maids, tea sellers, or laborers on family farms. The new law allows them to work for “family enterprises”

as well as entertainment and sports industries. Labor Minister Bandaru Dattatreya insists that children will be allowed to work only after school, and that employment can lift youngsters out of poverty by giving them “an entrepreneurial spirit.” But there’s no evidence that child labor alleviates poverty. In fact, the use of children as workers drives wages down and renders adults jobless, “because children are easier to exploit.”

Unfortunately, child labor is too prevalent to be banned outright, said Preetha Thomas in *The New Indian Express* (India). Children are “the pint-size *chaiwallahs* at railway stations, shoe polishers on pavements, waiters, domestic workers, agricultural laborers.” Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself was a



For many poor Indians, childhood is an unaffordable luxury.

is to have enough to eat. A blanket ban on child labor will only “drive the problem under cover.” Better to let the children work for their parents legally and ensure that they are still going to school.

It’s terribly naïve to imagine that this law will only result in children picking crops on family farms, said Usri Basistha and Nikita Lamba in *Tebelka* (India). The “family enterprise” exception covers any work that a parent does at home—and since many factories have outsourced produc-

tion to home-based piecework, children can do factory work alongside their parents. That includes carpet weaving, which exposes girls and boys to toxic dyes, or making glass bangles, which coats their lungs with dust and burns them with molten glass. One boy told us he gets up at 4 a.m. to go to school, and after coming home makes bangles until 10 p.m. That is not a childhood.

How ironic that just last year “we basked in the glory” of Kailash Satyarthi winning the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in eradicating child labor, said the *Hindustan Times* (India) in an editorial. Satyarthi has consistently advocated a total ban on work for children under 14, yet his advice is ignored. India has