

BALAKNAMA

UNIQUE NEWSPAPER FOR AND BY STREET CONNECTED CHILDREN

Balaknama is the newspaper presented by Street and Working children themselves to fight for their own rights and problems because they are being completely ignored.

BALAKNAMA MEMBERS SHARED HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023, RECALLING MOMENTS OF JOY

Reporters Sarita, Hansraj, Kajal, Raj Kishore, Kishan

As you all know, Balaknama is a renowned newspaper that has made its mark not only in India but also in other countries. Every month, Balaknama reporters bring news about street and working children to the government and society. After reading these stories in the newspaper, many government officials and workers also endeavor to provide facilities to the children. Through this narrative, we would like to inform you about how, during the year 2023, Balaknama's children have received facilities from the government or how some children have been delighted to meet such officials of the government, which has also strengthened child participation. When Balaknama reporters reach out to many street and working children and try to find out why they are unable to attend school, most working children cite the reason that their identification-related documents have been burnt, lost, or have not been created yet.

On May 26, 2023, during a meeting with the Rajasthan State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, held in collabo-

ration with the National Action and Coordination Group against Violence on Children, the issue of children not having Aadhaar cards was raised. Children mentioned that due to not having Aadhaar cards, they were being denied entry into schools and were unable to avail other social schemes. The Commission was made aware of all these issues. Taking note of this problem, the Commission, in collaboration with Chetna NGO, promptly organized the first-ever three-day special Aadhaar card camp to facilitate children's entry into schools during this session. The inauguration of the three-day (June 14-16, 2023) special Aadhaar card camp was held at Prem Nagar Kacchi Basti in Jaipur. The Chairperson of the Rajasthan State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Mrs. Sangita Beniwal, inaugurated the camp and assisted in helping children obtain identification through Aadhaar cards. As a result of this three-day camp organized by Chetna NGO, approximately 125 direct and indirect beneficiaries of about 10 alternative education centres benefited, resulting in children securing a place in schools



through the Aadhaar card camp, leaving the children quite delighted. During this period, Mrs. Draupadi Murmu (President of India) met with 160 marginalized children from various slums participating in the 12-day Gandhi Summer School organized by the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti (GSDS) at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The children's delegation was led by Mr. Vijay Goel, Vice Chairman of GSDS and former Central Minister. President Murmu conversed with the children enthusiastically and listened attentively to the activities they learned during these 12 days. She praised the children's strong determination and encouraged them to enthusiastically pursue their talents and upliftment. Mr. Vijay Goel explained about the

Gandhi Summer School, stating that the objective of this 12-day camp was to empower slum children through various types of activity-based initiatives. The children received training in activities such as dance, music, wall painting, poster making, theater, spinning wheel, cutting, videography, painting, bamboo work, sculpture, and paper among others. Members of Balaknama also participated in these activities, and they shared their experiences meeting President Draupadi Murmu. Sonam, a 9-year-old girl currently studying in the third grade, expressed, "When I reached the Rashtrapati Bhavan, I participated in various activities there, and we got the opportunity to meet India's President, Mrs. Draupadi Murmu, who encouraged us to



move forward in life, which made me very happy." Sania, a 12-year-old girl currently studying in the eighth grade, shared, "When we met Draupadi Murmu ji, we were very happy, and we had never thought that we would meet the President of India, and after meeting her, we were very happy and we also took photos with her." In the year 2023, Balaknama reporters had the opportunity to meet the education minister. During this time, Delhi's Education Minister, Atishi, honoured Change-makers with the first-ever Children Champion Award by DCPCR in the field of child rights and development. Through this unique award, DCPCR recognized and expressed gratitude to individuals and organizations who have

made significant contributions to children's health, education, and protection. Congratulating the award winners at the ceremony, Atishi stated that the recipients of the DCPCR Children Champion Award are among the extraordinary individuals nationwide who have faced many challenges and remained steadfast in bringing positive changes in the lives of all children. She emphasized that this award acknowledges their efforts and contributions towards the betterment of the country's children and will inspire them to work with renewed energy and enthusiasm. Addressing the winners in the Children category as one of the most inspirational categories, Atishi remarked that witnessing children striving to pro-

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THE GIRL LEARNED TO DIFFERENTIATE SAFE AND UNSAFE TOUCH, SPOKE UP, AND PROTECTED HERSELF

Balaknama reporter Kajal

Despite witnessing the integration of new dimensions in the country's development, cases of child sexual abuse persist in our society. To address these issues, collective efforts are made through various life skills workshops conducted in collaboration with street and working children. These

workshops aim to raise awareness about different sensitive issues, thereby educating and empowering participants. As part of this initiative, a workshop on safe and unsafe touch (Good Touch and Bad Touch) was conducted in a slum in Jaipur. The outcome of such life skills workshops became evident when Kajal, a reporter from Balakna-

ma, visited the slum and interacted with various children and community members. During this visit, she met an eight-year-old girl named Mamta (changed name). Mamta, in her conversation with the reporter, shared that her mother had left home and she was alone at that time, and her father had succumbed to the addiction of substance

abuse. Consequently, she was left without any care in the family. In this dire situation, her grandmother took responsibility for her, but she was also forced to beg for alms and collect scrap to make ends meet. During the discussion with the reporter, she revealed that, besides her grandmother, there was also an uncle living in their house,

approximately 45 years old. On a day when she was alone at home, this person attempted to touch her inappropriately. Not only that, he forcibly tried to take her to another place. However, Mamta resisted and started screaming loudly. The people in the nearby huts heard her cries, rushed to the scene, and physically confronted the individ-

ual, delivering a severe reprimand.

In the course of the interview with a reporter, she disclosed that a few months ago, at the Education Center of the Chetna organization, she was educated about good and bad touches. Armed with this knowledge, she bravely raised her voice and defended herself when she felt uncomfortable.

DUE TO A CYLINDER FIRE, TWO SHANTIES BURNED AFTER CAUTION WAS NEGLECTED

Bureau Report

When Balaknama reporters visited the Amuk Basti area in Gurugram, they noticed some children sitting in a gloomy state. Attempting to speak with one of the children, reporters found a 14-year-old named Arvind (name changed). Arvind, a resident of Gurugram, lives in a jhuggi basti with his parents. During the interview, he shared that his parents work from morning till evening, and when his

mother goes out for work, she leaves prepared food for them. One day, after returning from school, he felt extremely hungry, but on that day, his mother couldn't prepare lunch. So, feeling the hunger, he decided to cook rice on the gas stove by himself. He rinsed the rice and placed it on the gas stove. However, as he got engrossed in playing with his friends outside, he forgot about the rice and the stove. Suddenly, the gas cylinder caught fire, and the flames quickly



spread to the nearby plastic utensils and clothes. The fire engulfed the cylinder rapidly, and they were playing about

300 meters away from their jhuggi. When they finally realized, the fire had already spread significantly. The adjacent jhuggi also caught fire, resulting in the burning of essential documents, money, clothes, and more. The residents managed to douse the fire by pouring water, but two jhuggis were reduced to ashes. The incident highlights the importance of exercising caution while using gas stoves and the potential dangers of unattended cooking appliances.



CHICKENPOX OUTBREAK IN JAIPUR SLUM POSES RISK TO CHILDREN

Balakanama Reporter: Kajal, Talkative Reporter: Komal

Jaipur, known for its vibrant culture, is currently grappling with a health crisis in one of its slum areas due to the outbreak of chickenpox. The local reporter, Kajal, visited the Mangyavas slum in Jaipur to investigate and engage in conversations with the affected children. During the interactions, Kajal discovered that 7-year-old Komal had been suffering from fever, cough, and small rashes on her body for several days. Concerned about the extent of the problem, Kajal inquired if other children in the slum were also facing similar health issues. Komal revealed that approximately 10 to 15 children in the slum had fallen prey to the disease. The parents of these

children, mostly occupied with work, leave their homes early in the morning, leaving the sick children unattended. The lack of proper care exacerbates the situation, and the disease continues to spread among the vulnerable population. The symptoms reported by the affected children include high fever, cough, and various-sized rashes on their bodies. Chickenpox is highly contagious, and the direct contact between individuals has led to the rapid spread of the disease. Consequently, affected children are unable to attend school, significantly impacting their daily lives. The situation demands urgent attention and intervention to provide medical care and prevent further spread of the disease in the slum community.

CHILDHOOD GUIDANCE CRUCIAL; OTHERWISE AFFECTS ENTIRE LIFE

Balaknama reporter: Sabir Shah, Talkative Reporter: Abhay

Childhood forms the foundation of our lives, and the stronger the foundation, the stronger the building we can construct upon it. It is emphasized that the most crucial phase in our entire lifespan is our childhood. Therefore, special care and appropriate guidance for children are essential during this period. Despite this, the current situation reveals that the plight of child laborers working on the streets is not hidden from anyone. Likewise, many children living on the streets face various challenges in their lives during their childhood. The story of 11-year-old child laborer Abhay (name changed) living on the streets of Jaipur exemplifies the hurdles he faces in his life and education. Currently, Abhay resides in a rented room in a dark corner with his parents and a younger sister in a slum in Jaipur. During our visit to the slum, reporter Shabir Shah encountered Abhay selling balloons on the street. Abhay revealed that when he was



three years old, his parents, in search of employment, migrated from Tonk district to Jaipur, where they settled. During the discussion, he shared that he was initially enrolled in a school and used to attend classes. However, the school he attended only catered to boys up to the fifth grade. Subsequently, due to financial constraints and his parents' lack of education, Abhay's

name was struck off from the school records, depriving him of further education. Abhay explained that his parents made efforts to enroll him in another government school, but due to discrepancies in the documents, particularly in his father's name, the school denied him admission. Faced with such challenges, and after attempting two to three times to secure admission in different schools, Abhay's parents gave up on education for him. Consequently, Abhay shared that his mother started taking him along to sell toys and balloons, and now he independently sells them on the streets. Despite having studied up to the fifth grade, Abhay is now solely engaged in selling toys and balloons on the streets. He begins his day early in the morning, carrying a bunch of balloons on his shoulder, earning a livelihood through child labor. Although he managed to study up to the fifth grade, he sometimes resorts to begging to fill his stomach besides selling toys and balloons.

CHILDREN PERFORMING AT WEDDINGS, NEGLECTING EDUCATION

Balaknama Reporter: Shabir Shah, Talkative Reporter: Anuj

Due to the lure of earning money from a young age, children working in various challenging circumstances on the streets and in labor-intensive jobs are distancing themselves from education. The underlying message is that while the current season is bustling with wedding celebrations, street and working children are also involved in lifting decorative items such as ornaments and lamps at wedding or party events with their small hands. Reporter Anuj shared that in the neighbourhood, approximately 15 children change in rotation daily, participating with their



parents in lifting decorations at weddings or similar events. For this work, contractors occasionally provide everyone

with costumes resembling those of a band, and daily wages ranging from about 200 to 500 rupees are given. The determination of this wage depends on the distance covered by the wedding procession – when the distance is short, they are paid 200 rupees, and when the distance is greater, they receive 500 rupees. Anuj, explained that children are happy to be involved in such activities because it provides them with an opportunity to earn money and also allows them to wear similar costumes. However, due to their participation in such activities, regular school attendance is compromised, ultimately leading to their disconnection from education.

BALAKNAMA MEMBERS SHARED HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023, RECALLING MOMENTS OF JOY

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vide better lives for their peers in their communities is highly motivating. She applauded the children of Balaknama for voicing the issues of street and working children in their newspaper and advocating for them. She noted that in a country where only a few dedicate themselves to the better future of children, these awards provide new energy to those who continue to march forward. It's remarkable to see children initiating incredible changes amidst difficult circumstances, while most children of their age are surrounded by studies, mobiles, phones, or the internet. These children are taking significant steps to bring about an unbelievable change in their understanding. Congratulating

the recipients of the award, Atishi acknowledged their continuous efforts for the rights of society and children. Atishi also honored Balaknama journalists with the Children Champion Award. Additionally, it's delightful news for all readers and the Balaknama team that on December 23, 2023, the inauguration of Balaknamagallery in South Delhi took place. The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Balaknama Gallery was done by Sanjay Gupta, Director of Chetna Organization, chief-guest Camila Andrea Pinzón Jiménez (Colombian model and beauty pageant titleholder who was crowned Miss World Colombia 2022) along with the Badhte Kadam members and glimpses of Balaknama's entire journey present in this gallery.

CHILD ACCUSED OF THEFT DUE TO BEING COMPELLED TO DEFECATE IN THE OPEN

Talkative Reporter: Mohammad Khalid, Balaknama Reporter: Hans Kumar

When Balaknama reporter Hans Kumar visited the Shakur Basti area in Delhi, local reporter Mohammad Khalid informed him about an incident involving a 14-year-old named Riaz (name changed). Riaz resides in Shakur Basti and is currently studying in the sixth grade. One day, in the morning, he went near the railway tracks for defecation and noticed four boys attempting to steal iron from the standing train. The age of those boys was around fifteen to sixteen, and

they were involved in various criminal activities. According to Khalid, suddenly, those boys spotted Riaz watching them, and fearing that he might report their theft attempt, they threatened him. Terrified, Riaz tried to leave the scene, but the four boys caught him, twisted his arm, and warned him not to disclose their theft to anyone. Although there were others present, no one came to Riaz's aid. After the incident, he went home. Later, some officials from the Indian Railways visited Riaz's home, accusing him of attempting to steal iron from the train. They took him to their office. He attempted to



explain that he was innocent, but one of the railway officers

did not listen to his side of the story. After some time, his par-

ents and neighbors also arrived at the office and clarified to the officials that their child is a regular school-goer, attending classes at the Chetna NGO's education center. They also explained that on that particular day, he had gone near the railway tracks due to the overcrowding at the public toilet. Despite these explanations, one railway officer continued to doubt Riaz's innocence. Eventually, after a more thorough understanding of the situation and intervention from the local residents, the officials realized that there was a misunderstanding, and Riaz was allowed to go home.

TEACHERS RIDICULING CHILDREN, DAMAGING THEIR SELF-ESTEEM



Balakanama Reporter: Kajal, Talkative Reporter: Radhika

While the hallmark of a good teacher is to be someone students respect, eagerly anticipate, and approach with questions, parents should trust, and never resort to any form of physical or mental abuse towards children. Despite these ideals, the ground reality reveals

inappropriate behavior towards street and working children. Balakanama reporter Kajal conducted a visit to the contact point and attempted to understand the experiences of children in the context of their school. A girl named Radhika (changed name) expressed her feelings with a sense of dependency. She shared that although they are enrolled in school, going to school

doesn't bring them happiness. The teachers at their school do not treat them well. They address them as 'garbage' and claim that children from the neighbourhood attend school only for fun, implying that they lack any interest in education. She continued with a heavy heart, revealing that the teachers often taunt them, making derogatory remarks. The teachers' comments suggest that these children, coming from an impoverished area, are incapable of making academic progress and attend school merely for recreation. Such words, rather than motivating, have a detrimental effect on the self-esteem of these children. In an interview with the reporters, Radhika shared that she often contemplates quitting school due to the disrespectful treatment from the teachers. They label them as a burden and imply that they are unfit for formal education. Despite Radhika's desire to discontinue school, a sense of awareness restrains her from taking such a step.

CONTAMINATED DRAINS IMPACTING CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Bureau Report

During a recent visit by Balakanamareporters to the settlements in Gurugram, it was observed that approximately 30 children residing in the area were suffering from ailments such as cold, cough, and fever. In an effort to identify the cause of these health issues, reporters engaged with a 9-year-old girl living in the settlement. She shared that she resides in this settlement with her parents, and while she attend school regularly, the major challenge she face is the presence of a large drain in front of the settlement. This drain is consistently filled with water and surrounded by drainage from nearby sources, accumulating waste and urine. The concern lies in the fact that there is no alternative route beside this drain, and the residents have resorted to placing bricks or stones to create a makeshift path. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, the water often rises to the point where these makeshift paths get submerged, creating significant difficulties for people coming and going.



The only other accessible route is quite distant, approximately 1.5 kilometers away, making the journey time-consuming. When the residents take this route, they have to secure their children's legs with large cloth pieces due to the unhygienic conditions, resulting in an unbearable stench. The contaminated environment has led to illnesses among the residents, forcing the children to miss school for the past two weeks. Despite bringing this issue to the attention of local authorities, no concrete steps have been taken to address the problem. Consequently, the well-being of the children is being adversely affected by the lack of corrective measures.

EXPLOITATION OF PARENTS UNDER THE PRETENSE OF PROVIDING TUITION SERVICES

Balakanama Reporter: Hans Kumar, Talkative Reporter: Ram Ji

During a recent visit to the Shivaji Park area in Delhi by Balakanama reporter Hans Kumar, talkative reporter Ram Ji shared concerning information about a person in the area. This individual, posing as a teacher, is collecting fees from children under the pretext of providing tuition. Most residents in the Shivaji Park area live in slum settlements where the financial condition is not favorable enough to afford monthly tuition fees. However, despite these challenges, a person in the area is charging three hundred rupees monthly as

tuition fees to ensure a brighter future for their children. If a child skips tuition, the so-called teacher imposes a fine of ten rupees. Ram Ji revealed that this self-proclaimed teacher even refuses to teach drawing if the students fail to bring drawing sheets, extorting five rupees from each child and scolding them if they resist. The person claims to be a former government school teacher in Delhi but avoids providing any concrete information when asked for identification details. Furthermore, Ram Ji shared that this person has falsely assured some parents in the locality of securing jobs in the



Delhi Municipal Corporation, extracting ten thousand rupees from them. Consequently, most parents believe this individual to be trustworthy, leading them to pay three hundred rupees monthly as tuition fees. Ram Ji highlighted that the person's teaching methods in English and Hindi are questionable, and he charges an additional two hundred fifty rupees to a female student for creating an ID card, which he fails to deliver. The community is distressed by the conduct of this so-called teacher, and many parents are reluctant to send their children for tuition due to concerns about the quality of education. Despite the parents being less educated, they are patiently waiting for the truth to unfold.

HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES LED TO SCHOOL DROPOUT



Balaknama Reporter: Kajal,
Talkative Reporter: Rohit

When the Balaknama reporter was on a visit to the contact point Vijaysinghpura in Jaipur, she encountered a 13-year-old boy named Ronit (changed name) in the neighbourhood. He was carrying a bundle of bedsheets, meaning he was going to sell bedsheets. When our Balakanama reporter asked the boy why he was

doing this work instead of going to school, Ronit explained that he has three siblings, and their school is far from their locality. To send them to school, they had to pay daily transportation costs by rickshaw, and with the earnings of his father, most of it went towards alcohol consumption. Even managing the household expenses was a significant challenge. Continuing, Ronit

mentioned that he had also enrolled in school, but due to the heavy burden of household responsibilities, he had to leave education as he needed to support his family. The Balakanama reporter then inquired about where he gets these bedsheets and how much he earns from selling them each day. Ronit revealed that a contractor from Varanasi comes to their locality, sells bedsheets in bulk at a lower price, and they sell them in the surrounding areas for a profit. They buy a bedsheet for Rs. 150 and sell it for Rs. 200 to 250, making a profit of Rs. 50 to 100 on each sheet. They manage to sell approximately 2 to 3 sheets per day. Now, whether you call it a challenging situation or unfortunate circumstances, ultimately, due to the responsibility of sending his siblings to school and managing household duties, Ronit was forced to be deprived of his own education.



LIFE'S JOURNEY HAS ITS HIGHS AND LOWS ULTIMATELY BRINGING ME BACK TO SCHOOL

Talkative Reporter-Haseena,
Balaknama Reporter-Kishan

Rani (changed name), residing in the slums of Gurugram, shares her story. "Currently, I am 13 years old, living with my parents and five siblings in Gurugram. Two of my sisters are married. My mother works as a domestic helper, and

my father works as a mason in a building. Some time ago, when one of my sisters fell ill, we faced financial difficulties in arranging for her treatment. We had to borrow money from relatives as the hospitals in cities like Gurugram and Delhi required substantial funds for medical care. Unfortunately, we couldn't afford the expenses, so we took my sister to the village hospital. After undergoing extensive treatment in the village, she recovered. However, it took two years, during which I had to discontinue my schooling. After my sister's recovery, we returned to Gurugram, and my mother resumed her daily work. However, I was still unable to go back to school. Fortunately, a few days later, I met a representative from the Chetna Foundation. She informed me about the organization's mission and the opportunities for further education. She connected me with contacts who helped me enroll in school again. I started attending classes regularly, and after a few days, the foundation ensured my re-entry into the formal education system. Presently, I attend school every day, pursuing education in the fifth grade, and I am content with my academic progress."

CHILDREN RUN A GROCERY STORE TO HANDLE HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES

Talkative reporter -Khusbu,
Balaknama Reporter- Kishan

Balaknama reporter visited a settlement in Gurugram and observed a young girl selling vegetables. When the reporter approached her to inquire about her story, the girl, named Janaki (pseudonym), shared her narrative. Janaki revealed that she, along with her family, runs a small grocery store in Gurugram. Originally from Shikohabad, Uttar Pradesh, her family faced financial challenges in their hometown, where her father used to work in agriculture. To make ends meet, they decided to move to Gurugram. Initially, they rented a small room and faced difficulties in paying rent and meeting other expenses. Despite the challenges, her father, working as a laborer,



managed to sustain the family. Unable to afford schooling, Janaki and her siblings used to attend classes in Jhangirpuri, their previous residence. However, due to financial constraints, they had to discontinue their education when they moved to Gurugram. Eventually, they opened a small vegetable shop to support their livelihood.

Although they faced hardships, they persevered. Currently, alongside their vegetable store, they have also opened a small grocery shop where they sell items like flour, pulses, and rice. Despite not being able to attend school initially, she expressed a strong desire to study. However, the unfamiliar city offered no

support. After a few days, a representative from the Chetna Foundation noticed Janaki selling vegetables and initiated a conversation. The NGO provided them with information about education and various activities. Encouraged by this support, Janaki and her siblings started attending classes regularly, and engaging in activities like drawing, sports, and academics. They made friends and developed a routine of visiting the foundation daily. The involvement with the Chetna NGO and their newfound education opportunities have inspired Janaki to aspire for a return to formal schooling. With the guidance and support of the foundation, Janaki now dreams of rejoining school and pursuing her education further.

FAMILY INTERVENED AS SUSPICIOUS INDIVIDUAL STALKED A MINOR GIRL, EDUCATING HIM AND REPORTING THE MATTER TO POLICE

Talkative report- Nazia
Balaknama reporter- Hansraj

When Balaknama reporter Hans Kumar visited the Jakhira area in Delhi, he was informed by the local reporter Najia Parveen that a ten-year-old girl named Nishu (pseudonym) resides in Jakhira and is enrolled in the fifth grade. Many families in her vicinity lack access to LPG gas cylinders, either due to financial constraints or unavailability. Consequently, these families resort to cooking on traditional mud stoves, requiring wood for

fuel. They often gather dry branches from nearby forests for cooking purposes. One day, when Nishu's house ran out of wood, she, along with her friends, went to the forest to fetch some. On their way back, one of her friends needed to use the restroom, causing the group to stop near the railway tracks. As her friend went to relieve herself, they noticed an individual approaching from behind. Sensing something amiss, they quickly headed home. The man continued to follow them, prompting Nishu's father to take action. Nishu's



father confronted the man and inquired about his intentions. The man attempted to deceive them, but upon persistent questioning, Nishu's father

gave him a stern warning. Undeterred, the man resorted to physical aggression, leading to a scuffle. Nishu's father managed to restrain him, and

after a thorough warning, the man apologized and assured not to engage in such behavior again. Following the resolution of the incident, Nishu's father resumed his daily activities. However, a few days later, the same individual resumed stalking Nishu. This time, Nishu confided in her elder brother, who took matters into his own hands. He confronted the stalker, physically restrained him, and reported the incident to the police. Subsequently, the stalker ceased his actions, bringing an end to the distressing situation.

AFTER SIGNIFICANT EARLY LIFE STRUGGLES, THE GIRL RESUMED HER EDUCATION

Talkative Reporter: Tabassum

When Balaknama reporters visited the slums of Gurugram, they met Komal (name changed), and during their conversation, Komal shared her story. She explained, "My name is Komal, and currently, I live in the slums of Gurugram with my family. We are a family of 6, including two sisters, two brothers, and my parents. We also have my aunt's daughter living with us since my aunt passed away. So, altogether, we are a family of 6." Continuing her narrative, Komal revealed, "I am currently 12 years old, and I was born in Chandigarh, where we used to live earlier.

My parents used to work there and manage the household expenses. However, my father, unfortunately, spent most of his earnings on alcohol with his friends. This caused a lot of distress to my mother, and managing the household became quite challenging. After a series of arguments between my parents, my mother decided to move to Gurugram, and we started living in the slums near the climate tower." Komal continued, "After a few days of living in the slums, my mother found domestic work in a building, and my father found labor work as well. Both of them started going to work daily. One day, I gathered the



courage to talk to my parents and expressed my desire to go to school. My father enrolled me and my siblings, including my brother and sister, in a government school for the first

grade. We attended school for a few months, but due to some issues in the village, my parents had to take us back." She added, "We spent several months in the village, and after resolving the issues, when we returned to Gurugram with our parents, we found out that our names had been removed from the school rolls. We ended up staying at home. One day, representatives from Chetna Foundation visited our area for a survey. When they spoke to me, I felt scared, thinking they might catch us for some reason. I rushed to my mother, who was doing household chores, and she talked to the representatives. They explained

about Chetna NGO work, how they first connect children to education, and then send them to school. After learning this, my mother connected me, my brother, and sister to Chetna NGO, and we started going to study daily under their guidance." Komal concluded, "Now I am quite happy that I go to school every day, and currently, I am studying in class three. If I hadn't met the people from Chetna organization, I might not have been able to pursue education further. Despite my earlier setback in school, now I am thankful for the opportunity to learn. I am content with my current situation."

GENDER DISCRIMINATION HAMPERS GIRLS' HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Talkative Reporter: Afsana, Balakanama Reporter: Sarita

In the midst of hardworking children on the streets and in the workforce, there exists a girl named Afsana, aged 11. When our Balakanama reporters learned about Afsana, they spoke with her to understand her situation. She shared that she has three younger sisters and one brother, making them a family of four siblings. She went on to describe her family dynamics - her mother works as a domestic help, managing household chores, while her father is employed in the cleaning sector. Afsana, being the eldest among her siblings,

not only faces challenges in pursuing her education but also shoulders the responsibility of taking care of her younger brothers and sisters. Due to societal norms and financial constraints, Afsana's parents have imposed gender-based expectations on their children. While her brother is encouraged to attend school, she and her sisters are expected to stay at home and engage in household chores. She expresses her frustration, stating that despite having the desire to study, her responsibilities at home hinder her educational pursuits. She is disheartened by the gender bias within her family. She narrates the disparities in

treatment, mentioning that her brother receives preferential treatment in terms of food, clothing, and other amenities. Even during festivals, her brother is provided with new clothes, whereas Afsana and her sisters are left without such privileges. In a conversation with our reporters, Afsana expressed her deep desire to become a teacher if given the opportunity. She envisions a future where she can provide equal education to all children, irrespective of gender, and eliminate discrimination from her teaching practices. Despite the challenges she faces, Afsana remains determined to break free from the shackles of



gender bias and make a positive impact through education. This story sheds light on the struggles faced by many girls

like Afsana, emphasizing the importance of empowering girls and promoting equal opportunities for education.

SLUM CHILDREN STILL LACK CLEAN DRINKING WATER



Reporter-Rajkishor

A recent observation by Balaknama reporters in the JMD area behind the Gurgaon district revealed a disheartening situation where residents of a particular slum were struggling to access clean drinking water. The slum dwellers, residing in a region encroaching upon government land beyond the village, were not benefiting from any water-related schemes. Consequently, nearly a thousand people were compelled to rely on a single-

hand pump for their water needs. The scarcity becomes even more critical during the hot summer months when the lone hand pump is unable to cater to the needs of all residents. In some instances, disputes over water usage arise, exacerbating the problems faced by the inhabitants. When complaints are brought to the attention of the contractor responsible for the water supply, he nonchalantly attributes it to the inevitable depletion of water during the summer, advising people to manage

their usage accordingly. Compounding the issue is the fact that the water from the hand pump is exposed, leading to contamination from dust, dirt, ants, and other insects. This unsanitary condition of the water source has resulted in various health issues among the slum dwellers. Despite the challenges, the residents highlighted the importance of clean water, expressing their desire for a clean, reliable water supply. They pleaded for interventions such as water tankers delivering clean water or the installation of a couple of additional hand pumps in the area. The struggle for clean water remains a pressing concern for these families, who are often forced to resort to alternative means to acquire water for daily needs. The residents hope that authorities take swift action to address their plight and ensure a regular supply of clean and safe drinking water.

"YOUTH LABORING: CHILDREN INVOLVED IN BRICKBREAKING AND MUD HAULING"

Bureau Report

Reporters from Balakanam, residing in a slum in Gurugram, spoke to a child in the neighborhood who revealed that many children in their area are involved in the labor of carrying bricks. These children, aged between 14 and 15, accompany their parents and assist them in various tasks daily, such as placing bricks on their heads and transporting them to their destinations. They also help in fixing bricks by removing cement from the broken bricks with a hammer.

These children work with their parents from morning till evening, earning a daily wage of ₹300. Some children even work independently, away from their parents, engaging in labor at different locations. However, when they place the load on their heads, they face issues such as headaches and body pain. Occasionally, they encounter problems when contractors fail to pay them on time, leading to struggles in dealing with these hardships. Despite these challenges, after several days, they eventually receive their wages.

**CHILDREN'S HELP
LINE NUMBERS**

**CONTACT THESE TOLL FREE
NUMBERS IF YOU FACE ANY
PROBLEM.**

Child line Number

1098

Police Helpline Number

100

CHILDHOOD STUCK IN RIVER FISHING, DRIFTING FROM EDUCATION

Balaknama Reporter:- Kishan

When Balaknama reporters reached a slum settlement, they noticed that most children in the slum were engaged in various types of work, such as scavenging and domestic chores. Intrigued by the activities of the children, the journalists inquired about the number of children living in the slum and discovered that besides the typical chores, some children were also going towards the river to catch fish. Determined to understand the situation better, the journalists delved deeper into the lives of these children who ventured into the river for fishing. A girl



from the slum explained that there were approximately 35 huts in their settlement, with most children involved in domestic chores or scavenging. However, more than 40 children regularly went to the nearby river to catch fish. The settlement is

located next to a river, which is rich in fish. The children from the slum would visit the river daily to catch fish. The journalists, keen to learn more, spoke with a boy who provided detailed insights into their fishing activities. According to the boy, every

morning, when their parents went out for scavenging, the children would go to the river to catch fish. Armed with fish nets, they would catch around 15 to 20 kilograms of fish daily. The process involved using a mesh basket, and three companions were required

– two to catch the fish in the river and one to put the caught fish into a bag. While fishing, the children faced challenges such as submerged stones and household items in the riverbed, causing discomfort and sometimes injury to their feet. The fear of drowning was also a constant concern. After catching the fish, the children would categorize them based on size. The smaller ones were taken home for personal consumption, while the larger ones were sold to people in the slum, bringing in some income for the children's families. The money earned helped them manage their household expenses.

FATHER RUNS A PEANUT CART WHILE THE CHILD SIMULTANEOUSLY STUDIES AND SUPPORT HIM

Talkative Reporter- Badal,
Balaknama Reporter: Sarita

Balaknama reporter Sarita, during a visit to M.R. Tower Gurugram, discovered a hardworking boy named Badal (changed name), who is 14 years old. In an interview, Badal shared, "My father is elderly and weak, so he cannot do much work. He is only capable of doing light and comfortable tasks. Therefore, my father runs a peanut cart, and my mother works in other households doing cleaning chores. Speaking for myself, I go to school at 8:00 AM and return at 3:00 PM. After that, I go to study center at 4:00 PM and start studying. At 4:30 PM, I join my father at the peanut cart, where we both sell peanuts." Badal continued, "My father cannot



push the cart himself, so I help him in selling peanuts. It's more profitable for us as we can roam around with the peanut cart and earn more. I enjoy helping my father,

and he wants me to become a successful engineer. Even in our current situation, my father works hard for our education. I am happy that I can contribute to my education while helping my father. My younger siblings also help at home with tasks like cooking and cleaning, under the guidance of my mother." Expressing his determination, Badal stated, "I am content with my current situation, and despite the challenges, I am determined to work hard. My father's dream of me becoming an engineer keeps me motivated. Even though the stories of brave children may seem strange to some, often they are destined to face hardships. However, I believe that one day, with my hard work, I will overcome all obstacles."



DESPITE PAYING REASONABLE RENT FOR THE SHANTI, BASIC FACILITIES REMAIN UNAVAILABLE DURING A VISIT BY BALAKNAMA

Reporter Kishan

a journalists, they came across a settlement where approximately 25 slums were located. Upon closer inspection, the journalists felt the need to talk to the children in the settlement, as there were limited facilities available for

them, and most amenities were still inaccessible to the children. A 15-year-old boy residing in the slum, when asked about the facilities available and the challenges he faced, explained that they had been living in this place for almost six years. Approximately 500 meters away from the slum, some buildings were under construction. Most people in the slum were engaged in labor work related to building construction. The rent for a room in the nearby village is around ₹3000, and interestingly, in the slum, the rent for a similar space is also ₹3000. However, they face some challenges, such as the risk of the tin-roofed slums flying away during heavy rain and storms. The slums are made of tin, with large stones placed on top to prevent the tin from flying away. Despite the availability of water, during heavy rain and storms, water starts filling up in the slum due to the flying tin roofs. In the slum, there is a consistent shortage of electricity, and the power supply is mostly during the night, and it's often stolen. The lack of electricity throughout the day leads to various difficulties. Moreover, there is no proper toilet facility, and the existing toilets are unclean. The toilet lacks a proper gate, and people manage using a sari as a curtain. Despite bringing up these issues with the slum owner several times, no action has been taken.

PROPER PARENTAL GUIDANCE IN CHILDHOOD PREVENTS CHILD LABOR

Reporter: Kishan

When reporters reached the Habibpur village in Noida, children who attended school shared about a 12-year-old girl in their class. They informed that they were currently in the sixth grade. There was a girl in their class who seemed disinterested in studying. Despite this, she would come to school for two to three days every week and spend the rest of her time at home. Her parents would tell her to go to school, but she would assure them that she would go, yet she never did because she had no interest in studying. One day during a parent-teacher meeting, the girl's father realized that she would lie about going to school but never actually



attended. Consequently, her father withdrew her from school. When asked what she wanted to do, she expressed interest in doing some work as she had no interest in studying. Consequently, her father assigned her household chores like washing dishes

and cleaning. Now, she spends her days doing household chores, cooking, etc. She starts working at 6:00 AM and returns home at 1:00 PM for lunch, then resumes work at 3:00 PM. Before assigning household chores, her father had her work in a factory for a

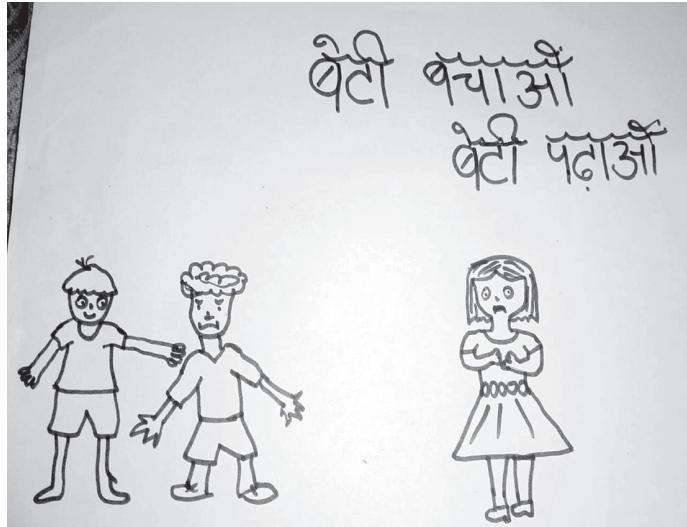
few days, but she was dismissed due to inspection issues. After that incident, her father did not let her work in the factory and assigned her household chores instead. Currently, she earns ₹9000, which she uses for household and personal expenses. Other children who attend school informed that the girl was not interested in studying, but it doesn't mean she lacks interest in any work. Education is a fundamental right for children, and if desired, the girl should be encouraged to pursue her education instead of being engaged in household chores. This course of action by the father may not be appropriate as education is a child's right. If desired, the parents should guide her towards education and send her back to school.

GIRLS FACE DIFFICULTIES LEAVING HOME DUE TO UNRULY NEIGHBORHOOD BOYS

Talkative Reporter Suhana,
Balaknama Reporter Sarita

When Balaknama reporters visited the Paldaslum in Gurugram, talkative reporter Suhana revealed that boys around huts whistle, threaten, and intimidate us when they see girls. This causes fear among the girls, preventing them from venturing outside their homes. Even going out for education is considered unsafe for them. It implies that if we step out, these unruly elements will intimidate and threaten us

again, causing us great fear. Consequently, our parents do not permit us to leave our homes. Although staying at home is disheartening for all of us, we cannot even go to our study centers. Despite the guidance from our Contact Point coordinator, we remain hesitant due to fear. I believe it is because of such boys that our parents decide to marry us off at an early age. By doing so, they shatter the dreams of these children, who end up with early marriages, and their artistic talents remain undiscovered. Moreover, they



lose their self-confidence, believing they can do nothing and are destined to live their lives within the confines of their homes. When our journalists asked Suhana what she would become if these issues were resolved and she had an opportunity to achieve something, she expressed her desire to become a successful police officer. She envisioned putting such boys behind bars so that girls could study freely, feel secure when stepping outside, and live their lives openly, realizing their dreams.

AFFECTED BY STEPMOTHER'S WRATH



Bureau Report

When reporters arrived at a settlement in Gurgaon, they met a girl whose mother had passed away, and she was currently living with her stepmother. During the conversation, the girl, named Sonia (changed name), shared the difficulties she faces while

living with her stepmother. She revealed that she resides in a rented slum in Gurgaon with her stepmother and father. When she was 7 years old, her biological mother passed away, and her father remarried two years later. Upon her stepmother's arrival, she couldn't address her as "mother" because she knew

her real mother, but her father and stepmother insisted she call her "mother," which she felt uncomfortable with. Her father works in a factory, and she engages in household chores from morning till evening, such as washing dishes, cooking, and laundry. Her entire day is spent doing these tasks. Her stepmother often points out mistakes in her work and mistreats her severely when her father is away for work. Although her stepmother refrains from scolding or hitting her in front of her father, she criticizes her heavily and uses foul language behind his back. One day, frustrated, she complained to her father, but he only listened and later punished her severely when he went back to work. Due to this, she is now afraid to speak up and is scared even to utter a word. It's often said that one's own mother is one's true mother; a stepmother is just in name.

EDUCATION HINDERED: SIBLINGS TAKE PRIORITY

Talkative Reporter: Noorjehana,
Balaknama Reporter-Sarita

In a recent visit to the Ghata Gaon Contact Point in Haryana, Balaknama reporter Sarita encountered the story of Noorjehana, an 11-year-old girl who shed light on the challenges she and her family face. Noorjehana's family consists of her parents, a big sister, and a little brother. The eldest sister is unable to attend school due to her responsibilities of taking care of the younger siblings, leaving Noorjehana worried about her sister's future. Noorjehana explained that her mother works as a domestic helper, while her father runs a scrap store. Their daily survival depends on these meager earnings. If her mother doesn't work, the family faces financial difficulties, making it essential for the older sister to prioritize

taking care of the younger siblings over attending school. Noorjehana shared that her sister feels upset and occasionally falls into a state of depression, fearing that she might end up uneducated like their mother. Despite the family's financial struggles, Noorjehana expressed her sister's remarkable artistic talent and interest in various activities, such as drawing and sports. The teachers from her sister's previous school still remember her fondly. When asked about her own dreams, Noorjehana's sister expressed her desire to become a successful artist and avoid working in other people's homes like their mother. This poignant narrative highlights the challenges faced by many children in similar circumstances, where responsibilities at home take precedence over education.

APPEARANCES ASIDE, THEY ARE ULTIMATELY CHILDREN

Bureau Report

When reporters arrived at the slum settlement of Greater Noida, they found that construction work was underway on several buildings about 100 meters away from the slum. The reporters saw many children involved in various tasks at the construction site with their own eyes. Initially, the reporters were shocked to see seemingly older children engaged in construction work. However, upon speaking with children aged between 12 to 14 years residing in the slum, they learned more about the situation. The children explained that there are about 50 to 55 huts where they live,

and most of the residents go to work in the nearby buildings for construction purposes. These huts have been provided to them by the building occupants. They, too, live in the same slum, and their parents work in the construction of these buildings. They attend school regularly and receive education through mobile classrooms. When reporters made further inquiries, the children revealed that the people living in the slum, including the children, might look older due to their physical appearance, but they are between 15 to 17 years old. These children accompany their parents to work in the buildings and engage in various tasks such as delivering cement



bricks, ferrying gravel through lifts, and disposing of construction debris. They spend the entire day working with their parents in the buildings instead of attending school. They earn money equivalent to what their parents earn, which is accounted for in their parents' attendance records. Moreover, work continues in the buildings even at night, with children and their fathers staying until 11 PM, resulting in additional attendance marks for them. No one questions their presence during inspections because they physically appear older, making it clear only upon seeing them. Therefore, they continue to work in the buildings without worry.

CHILDREN FORCED TO PRIORITIZE SIBLING CARE OVER EDUCATION IN NOIDA SLUM

Talkative Reporter-Lakshmi,
Reporter-Kishan

During a visit to a slum in Noida, where most children were occupied with the responsibility of taking care of their younger siblings, reporters attempted to understand why these children were not attending school and what led them to prioritize taking care of their younger siblings. In response to this question, a 13-year-old girl shared that they live in a jhuggi basti (slum) with their parents but are currently not going to school. Instead, they are engaged in looking after their younger siblings. Every day, their parents leave for



work early in the morning. While the mother works as a domestic helper, the father is employed to cut grass in a government park. When their parents are away at

work, there is no one to take care of the younger siblings, so the responsibility falls on the older siblings. The girl explained that her parents cannot afford to leave their work to look after the younger ones, and there is no one in the neighbourhood willing to help. Due to this situation, they are compelled to prioritize taking care of their younger siblings over going to school. Additionally, they have to manage household chores, which further limits their ability to attend school regularly. The girl mentioned that most children in the slum are occupied with similar responsibilities, making it challenging for them to pursue education.

FATHERS' ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION EMBARRASSES CHILDREN, DISRUPTING STUDY ENVIRONMENT



Balaknama reporters: Badshah
and Kishan

In a conversation with reporters from Balaknama, a child revealed a troubling situation in his neighborhood. He narrated that there is a friend of his in school who is currently grappling with an issue. He is 13 years old and lives in a rented hut in the neighborhood with his parents. He is quite diligent in his studies, attends school regularly, and receives daily praise for his academic performance. However, he is troubled by a domestic issue at home, which gradually distracts him from his studies. In his household, there are his mother and father. His father works as a laborer, but his earnings do not contribute significantly to the household expenses. His mother works as a domestic helper to make ends meet. When his father

returns home from work at night, he spends his earnings on alcohol, neglecting his family's financial needs. When his mother asks for money to manage the household expenses, his father refuses and often abuses her verbally, sometimes resorting to physical violence. Witnessing such incidents deeply disturbs the child, making him feel resentful and worried about his family's situation. Moreover, whenever his father doesn't go to work, his mother has to dip into the savings she manages to accumulate for household expenses, as his father spends his earnings on alcohol. This irresponsibility on the part of his father not only affects the family's financial stability but also undermines the child's faith in education, fearing he might have to abandon his studies to support his family financially.

"CHILDREN SEEKING ALMS FOR SURVIVAL, REQUESTING FLOUR AND RICE DOOR-TO-DOOR"

Talkative reporter- Sushma,
Reporter-Kishan

In this news report, we shed light on the children who go door to door asking for alms uniquely. When reporters visited a neighborhood in Gurgaon, the reporter spoke to the children who engage in daily begging activities. According to the reporter, most of the children in this area come daily to beg for alms. During interactions with some of these children, the reporter learned about an 11-year-old boy who begs for alms regularly. He goes from village to village, alley to alley, seeking alms. When he goes begging at home, he carries a bag or sack with him. Whatever he gets from the households, such as ration items like rice, lentils, flour, vegetables, spices, etc., he collects and brings back home. Even though it is a form of begging, the



children do manage to get some essential items from their efforts. The children believe that when they go begging, people seldom send them back empty-handed. They receive either a small amount of money or groceries, helping them manage household expenses. The children stated that the generosity of people ensures they return with something, be it just two or five rupees or groceries to sustain their homes. Sometimes, they also visit traffic signals for alms, which further contributes to

their families' livelihood. The children begin their begging routine in the morning and return home by evening. While most places respond positively, there are instances where people refuse to give, sometimes even resorting to anger and hurling abuses. This makes the children hesitant to beg at those places. In conclusion, these children continue with this activity as it has become their way of life, ensuring they sustain their families with whatever little support they receive from the people they approach.

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UNDERAGE CHILDREN SET UP STALLS IN WEEKLY MARKETS DUE TO FINANCIAL PRESSURE

Talkative reporter-Nihal,
Balaknama reporter -Hans
Kumar

When balaknama reporter Hans Kumar visited the Amar Park area in Delhi, he was informed by local reporter Nihal that near his home, there is a weekly market where small vendors sell household items like vegetables, spices, and clothes from their makeshift stalls to earn a livelihood. Nihal further

mentioned that children who enrolled in school also set up stalls in these weekly markets, which prevents them from attending school regularly. He shared that a thirteen-year-old named Sonu (name changed) attends eighth grade and also works at the weekly market in addition to attending classes at Chetna NGO's learning center. When asked why he sets up a stall in the market, Sonu explained that his family's financial situation isn't stable,



which compels him to work in the market. He mentioned that many other children like

him are forced to work due to poor financial conditions at home. Among them, some

are sent by their parents to set up stalls forcefully for a few bucks, which adversely affects their education. Some of these children attend Chetna NGO's contact club for studies, although most of them do not wish to engage in such work; rather, they aspire to educate themselves and build a bright future. However, they are compelled to work out of necessity to support their families or due to parental pressure.

You can also support in the publication of the Balaknama newspaper, For more info please contact : info@chetnango.org

This newsletter is for limited delivery only. All the pictures are printed by the approval of the children.

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