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## 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report: India

INDIA: Tier 2

The Government of India does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period; therefore India remained on Tier 2. These efforts included convicting traffickers, initiating a high-profile investigation into one case that allegedly involved officials complicit in sex trafficking at a government-funded shelter, and continuing to raise awareness of trafficking. The Supreme Court oversaw a key shelter abuse case and encouraged all states to review their shelter homes given concerns regarding the overall level of oversight. The lower house of Parliament passed the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill that was aimed at strengthening investigations and coordination of victim services, but it was not taken up by the upper chamber during the reporting period. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government took some action following reports of government complicity in forced labor and sex trafficking, although the systemic failure to address forced labor and sex trafficking in government-run and government-funded shelter homes remained a serious problem. The government did not report information on investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of traffickers, or on trafficking victims identified and referred to care. NGOs reported government law enforcement and victim identification efforts were limited compared to the scale of the problem. Authorities sometimes penalized victims for unlawful acts their traffickers compelled them to commit. The government's efforts to address bonded labor remained insufficient compared to the scale of the problem, and in the majority of reported cases officials did not follow the law requiring provision of release certificates and compensation to bonded laborers removed from exploitation, which prevented victims from accessing government services and in some cases led to their re-victimization.

### PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of all forms of trafficking, including bonded labor. • Vigorously investigate allegations of official complicity in human trafficking and sentence perpetrators to significant prison terms. • Develop and immediately implement regular monitoring mechanisms of government-run and government-funded shelters to ensure appropriate quality of care, and promptly disburse funding to shelters that meet official standards for care. • Improve central and

state government implementation of protection programs and compensation schemes for trafficking victims to ensure they receive benefits, release certificates, and compensation in a timely manner. • Establish Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) in all districts with clear mandates, dedicated funding, and specially trained staff. • Increase efforts to proactively identify victims by dissemination and implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for victim identification and referral, and train officials on their use. • Cease inappropriate penalization of trafficking victims. • Amend the definition of trafficking in Section 370 of the Penal Code to include forced labor trafficking and ensure that force, fraud, or coercion are not required to prove a child sex trafficking offense. • Cease forcible detention of adult trafficking victims in government-run and government-funded shelters. • Eliminate all recruitment fees charged to workers. • Increase oversight of, and protections for, workers in the informal sector, including home-based workers. • Lift current bans on female migration through agreements with destination countries that protect Indian workers from human trafficking. • Develop a national action plan to combat trafficking. • Provide rehabilitation services for child soldiers associated with non-state armed groups. • Provide anti-trafficking training for diplomatic personnel.

## PROSECUTION

The government did not report law enforcement data during the reporting period, rendering it impossible to compare efforts with the previous year. Indian law criminalized sex trafficking and some forms of labor trafficking. Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) criminalized trafficking offenses that involved exploitation that included any act of physical exploitation or any form of sexual exploitation, slavery or practices similar to slavery, and servitude. The law did not explicitly address labor trafficking. The recruitment of children younger than age 18 by non-state armed groups was not criminally prohibited. Section 370 prescribed penalties ranging from seven to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine for offenses involving an adult victim, and 10 years to life imprisonment and a fine for those involving a child victim; these penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as kidnapping. Inconsistent with international law, Section 370 required a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion to constitute a child sex trafficking offense, and therefore did not criminalize all forms of child sex trafficking. However, Sections 372 and 373 of the IPC criminalized the exploitation of children through prostitution without requiring a demonstration of such means, thereby addressing this gap. These sections prescribed penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine, which were also sufficiently stringent and commensurate with those prescribed for other serious crimes, such as kidnapping. Section 370 criminalized government officials' involvement in human trafficking and prescribed penalties up to life imprisonment and a fine. Bonded labor was specifically criminalized in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, which prescribed sufficiently stringent penalties of up to five years' imprisonment. The Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act (BLSA) prescribed penalties of up to three years' imprisonment, which were not sufficiently stringent. The Juvenile Justice Act and other sections of the IPC criminalized many forms of forced labor; however, these provisions were unevenly enforced, and some of their prescribed penalties were not sufficiently stringent,

allowing for only fines or short prison sentences. The government frequently used the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (ITPA) and various provisions of the IPC to prosecute sex trafficking, which prescribed penalties that were sufficiently stringent and commensurate with other serious crimes, such as kidnapping. In July 2018, the lower house of Parliament passed the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Protection, and Rehabilitation) Bill. Some NGOs noted that the draft Trafficking in Persons Bill demonstrated that the government understood the trafficking problem, was aware of the gaps in the existing response to trafficking, and was willing to address them in a coordinated way. The bill lapsed while pending in the upper house of Parliament and did not pass during the reporting period.

The government did not report anti-trafficking law enforcement data during the reporting period. The National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB) did not issue the 2017 Crime in India Report due to a change in methodology that was intended to increase the amount of data collected, including on trafficking cases. Media reported the government initiated 11 trafficking investigations involving at least 52 suspected traffickers (nine cases of sex trafficking, one of forced labor, and one case where the type of alleged trafficking was unknown), concluded six investigations and prosecutions from previous years, and convicted 19 traffickers. Sentences for convicted traffickers ranged from probation to life imprisonment. Five of the six completed cases involved sex trafficking and resulted in the conviction of 16 traffickers and the acquittal of one suspect; the sixth case, for bonded labor, resulted in conviction of three traffickers. The Delhi Commission for Women reported that 15 prosecutions were pending trial at the end of 2018; it was unclear if there was overlap between these cases and trafficking cases reported by media. During the previous reporting period, the government released the 2016 Crime in India Report, which reported investigation of 5,217 trafficking cases, completion of prosecution in 587 cases, conviction of traffickers in 163 cases, and acquittal of individuals in 424 cases. It separately reported 114 investigations, 13 case prosecutions, and three convictions for bonded labor under the BLSA. The acquittal rate for trafficking cases was 72 percent in 2016. Media reported that the police filed First Information Reports (FIRs) in additional trafficking cases during the reporting period, although it was unclear if they were actively investigating these cases. NGOs continued to comment that available law enforcement data did not reflect the large scale of human trafficking in India, as police did not always file FIRs to officially register a complaint and settled many other cases at the complaint stage. Some authorities in West Bengal and Jharkhand allegedly ordered police to register trafficking cases as “missing persons” to reduce the number of trafficking cases in official statistics. NGOs also stated that law enforcement efforts, especially against bonded labor, remained low compared to the scale of the problem, and some police dissuaded labor trafficking victims from pursuing charges against their employers. NGOs noted several states showed some political will to address bonded labor abuses with improved awareness of the issue.

NGOs reported the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) established a new Women Safety Division and conducted police trainings and judicial collegiums related to trafficking. AHTUs served as the primary investigative force for human trafficking crimes. The government did not report how many AHTUs operated during the reporting period, compared to 264 AHTUs in the previous reporting period. However, some AHTUs lacked

clear mandates, were not solely dedicated to trafficking, and sometimes received requests for assistance after a delay of several months, which limited the effectiveness of investigations. In a few cases, police reportedly released alleged sex traffickers immediately on bail and prioritized investigation of other crimes. An NGO reported some district magistrates mediated cases of bonded labor to secure back wages for bonded laborers in lieu of referring suspects for criminal prosecution. Court backlogs, inadequate preparation, lack of funding, and a lack of prioritization of trafficking delayed cases, increased the length of trials, and sometimes resulted in acquittals. Some police training centers included anti-trafficking training in their regular curriculum. State and local governments partnered with NGOs and international organizations to train police, prosecutors, and judicial officers on human trafficking.

A lack of full accountability for misconduct and corruption continued at various levels of government, contributing to widespread impunity. NGOs reported that in a number of instances police refused to register FIRs for cases in which officials were the alleged perpetrators. Unofficial village caste councils were reported to pressure lower caste female sex trafficking victims not to pursue criminal cases. In the past, some law enforcement officers reportedly received bribes from sex trafficking establishments and sexual services from victims in exchange for alerting the traffickers of forthcoming raids, and there was no indication this practice had ceased. Police initiated one investigation into a sex trafficking ring that allegedly involved an official, and the investigation was ongoing at the close of the reporting period. Some Indian immigration officials in New Delhi and Mumbai reportedly accepted bribes to allow traffickers to transport Nepali women to the Gulf or Malaysia without proper documentation, where some women were victims of forced labor. During the reporting period, several junior police officers in Kerala alleged forced labor by senior officers. The Chief Minister vowed to end the practice, and authorities temporarily transferred one official but did not file formal charges or take action against the other accused.

While serious challenges in oversight of government-run and government funded-shelters continued during the year, some of these cases drew the Supreme Court’s attention to the issue, and NGOs reported some subsequent positive actions by some state governments. Lack of investigations into suspected trafficking crimes and broader physical and sexual abuse of trafficking victims at government-run and government-funded shelters due to widespread negligence created an atmosphere of impunity for shelter employees and government officials to engage in trafficking. Victims alleged in a few cases government officials facilitated trafficking and, in three cases were clients of shelter residents exploited in sex trafficking. In one government-funded shelter for victims of child labor and abandonment, at least five girls died after sex trafficking, and traffickers buried them on the shelter’s premises; victims alleged both government and NGO officials facilitated the sex trafficking and were among the clients of the victims at that shelter. A report commissioned by the Bihar state government noted abuse “varying in forms and degrees of intensity” was reported to be prevalent in almost all 110 government-funded women and child care institutions surveyed, and the report noted “grave concerns” in 17 institutions that required immediate attention. NGOs commended the Bihar government for undertaking the study and allowing the investigator full authority and independence to report on all institutions in the state. The Bihar state government initially investigated some of the allegations, but the

Supreme Court called the government’s overall inaction on the cases “very shameful” and noted the state had been “very soft” and “very selective” in investigating alleged perpetrators. However, the Bihar state government did arrest the husband of a local political leader implicated in one of the shelter cases and took over the operations of all shelters in the state. In November, due to the pace of investigations into the other cases, the Supreme Court ordered the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to take over investigation of the additional 16 shelters in Bihar with the “gravest concerns” of abuse, in addition to the shelter it had already begun investigating. As of January 2019, the CBI had initiated investigations into nine of the 17 homes, and the Supreme Court was monitoring the cases. Media and NGOs reported other cases of abuse, including trafficking, in other government-run, government-funded, and private shelters across in four other states.

In at least two cases allegedly involving sex trafficking in government-funded shelters, lawyers and media reported government officials impeded the investigation. In Deoria, despite 20 letters from the district government to cease sending vulnerable women and children to a shelter operating without proper registration, three police superintendents sent at least 405 girls to the shelter over two years, where shelter employees exploited many in sex trafficking. Furthermore, a home department official reportedly tried to investigate the shelter but received an order from a superior not to do so. In response, the state government requested a report from all shelter homes in the state, initiated investigations, and arrested the owner of the shelter. In a separate case in Agra, October 2018, a judge convicted the government-run shelter warden with a sentence of life imprisonment for selling shelter residents into sex trafficking, some of whom police had initially removed from sex trafficking and sent to the shelter for rehabilitation. The initial police lead on the investigation, however, had alleged the involvement of multiple traffickers, but authorities transferred him before he named additional suspects. A senior government official claimed the warden had avoided investigation for 10 years due to political connections. After the issuance of the Bihar report and Deoria case, the Supreme Court encouraged the National Commission for Women and state-level institutions to audit the status of shelter homes across India, and Uttar Pradesh issued interim guidelines for the management of shelter homes and ordered the inspection of all homes in the state. The Delhi government also initiated a review of all of its shelter homes during the year. The government did not report the outcomes of any of these inspections, or if any other states undertook such inspections.

## PROTECTION

The government decreased victim identification and protection efforts. The government did not report comprehensive data on victim identification efforts during the reporting period. Media indicated the government and NGOs, at times in partnership, identified at least 1,172 trafficking victims during the reporting period, including men, women, and children exploited in forced labor and sex trafficking. The Railway Protection Force intercepted 244 children from dangerous situations, including potential trafficking. Between January and November 2018, the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana police identified 858 trafficking victims; it was unclear how much overlap existed between this data and cases reported by media. Through the 2016 Crime in India Report, the

government reported identifying 22,955 victims the previous reporting period. A 2009 MHA non-binding directive advised state officials to use SOPs for proactive victim identification and referral to services. Not all 29 states employed SOPs, although at least one state worked with civil society to establish SOPs for its child welfare committees. In December 2017, the National Human Rights Commission created and published SOPs for combating human trafficking. According to the commission, awareness and implementation of the SOPs were more common in urban centers due to closer supervision by senior police officials. NGOs noted some police relied on NGOs to report victims to the police for action. In some cases, poor inter-state coordination impeded victims’ ability to obtain services and participate in civil and criminal cases upon return to their home states. The Odisha Labor Department took steps to improve inter-state coordination on labor trafficking cases by establishing help desks, located in the capital cities of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, as well as Delhi, to identify trafficking victims from Odisha. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) continued to support some broad national child protection mechanisms, including a hotline for children in need of assistance, a system to identify missing children, and rescue operations for missing children. The NCRB drafted a memorandum of understanding with the U.S. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to share data on missing and exploited children, which received Cabinet approval on February 28.

The government did not report how many trafficking victims it assisted or referred to care during the reporting period. The government could refer adult female and child trafficking victims to government-run shelters, government-funded shelters run by NGOs or private organizations, or privately-run shelters. NGOs continued to report that the number of government-run and government-funded shelters was insufficient, and overcrowding compromised victim rehabilitation. Both government- and NGO-run shelters faced serious shortages of financial resources and trained personnel, particularly counselors and medical staff. No shelters were available for adult male trafficking victims. Government child welfare committees generally returned child trafficking victims to their parents or placed them in privately-run shelters, government-run juvenile justice homes (some of which may have housed child victims with children accused of crimes), or government-run women and children’s homes, some of which allowed routine abuse as noted above. Children largely received the same services as adults. MWCD continued to fund NGO- and government-run shelter and rehabilitation services for women and children through the Ujjawala program for female sex trafficking victims (operating 148 shelters as of July 2018) and the Swadhar Greh program for women in difficult circumstances (operating 518 shelters as of July 2018). The central government did not report its budgets for the Ujjawala and Swadhar Greh programs in 2018-2019, but initial estimates signaled a potential decrease for the Ujjawala program and a larger decrease for the Swadhar Greh program. MWCD ran One-Stop Centers for female victims of crime that female sex trafficking victims could access. It did not report if these centers assisted any trafficking victims during the reporting period, and some NGOs reported the centers were ineffective and difficult to access. In some cases, trafficking victims were detained in shelter homes, including in the homes described above that allowed routine physical and sexual abuse. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Railway issued a circular to stationmasters nationwide allowing the use of station funds to cover child protection expenses for vulnerable

children such as trafficking victims. NGOs relied primarily on donor contributions, although some received government funds. The disbursement of government funding to NGOs was sometimes delayed for multiple years.

During the reporting period, media, NGOs, and authorities documented a persistent lack of oversight and negligence in government-run, government-funded, and privately-run shelters that sometimes resulted in abuse and trafficking of residents. The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights estimated 1,300 of India’s approximately 9,000 shelters for vulnerable people were not registered with the government and operated with little or no oversight. In several cases, government-funded shelter homes continued to operate despite significant gaps in mandatory reporting and allegations of abuse, at times due to alleged political connections. Police documented at least 156 residents—including sex trafficking victims—missing from six shelters as of March 2019; at least one shelter owner had reportedly sold some of the women and girls for prostitution. In another case, 30 girl residents of a shelter were reportedly exploited in sex trafficking. Due to unsafe conditions and forcible detention in government-run and -funded shelters, some sex trafficking victims—including children—ran away, and at least one attempted suicide in the shelter during the reporting period. In one case, the Bihar’s Child Rights commission visited a government-funded shelter home in November 2017 and requested officials remove children from the home due to the unacceptable conditions. The district magistrate ordered the home to initiate shut down procedures in December 2017, but it operated until June 2018, when authorities uncovered shelter employees had exploited approximately 30 girl residents in sex trafficking. In September 2018, the Bihar state government announced that it would assume management of all government-funded and NGO-run shelters by December 2018 and cancelled the licenses of at least 50 NGOs that had been operating shelters in the state. The central government committed to audit all shelter homes for children, which also cared for trafficking victims, and the Supreme Court ordered all states to complete their respective audits by September 2018; as of September 2018, however, authorities had only surveyed approximately one-third of shelters. In September 2018, the Supreme Court ordered the MWCD to formulate a child protection policy to prevent abuse in government-run and -funded shelter homes. MWCD began drafting the policy, in consultation with NGOs and activists. The Supreme Court further implored MWCD to present an update on incidents of child sexual abuse in all shelter homes; MWCD did not produce the report by the close of the reporting period. NGOs noted concern for children transferred from NGO shelters to government shelters, as the scale of abuse and concerns regarding limited oversight were reportedly similar in both institutions.

While the government had a program to compensate and provide services to former bonded laborers, it failed to fully implement the program, and overall efforts were insufficient to the scale of the problem. The central government had a program through which bonded labor victims could obtain assistance and compensation upon conviction of their trafficker to obtain full benefits, although delays in implementation led to many victims returning to bonded labor. In 2016, the government amended the program to include female sex trafficking and child forced labor victims as recipients and to authorize local district authorities to provide immediate monetary assistance up to 20,000 Indian rupee (INR) (\$287) to a victim released from bonded labor without a release certificate, regardless of the status of the related court case. The release of the



overall compensation amounts (between 100,000 INR [\$1,430] and 300,000 INR [\$4,300] based on the victim’s demographics) remained contingent on issuance of a release certificate and the conviction of the trafficker or administrative processes that could take several years to conclude. Implementation of this program, however, remained inadequate. Since 2016, the government has not reported providing full compensation to any former bonded laborers. Former bonded laborers were also entitled to “release certificates” enabling them to receive government-funded services. The disbursal of such certificates, however, varied greatly between states; some victims received certificates at or soon after their rescue, especially in areas with significant coordination between the government and NGOs. Other victims experienced lengthy delays before obtaining certificates. NGOs reported some officials in Uttar Pradesh treated bonded labor cases as labor exploitation, which meant victims were not identified as bonded labor victims, did not receive “release certificates,” and were not eligible for government compensation or services. One NGO reported that among the 537 victims it successfully removed from bonded labor during the reporting period, the government only provided release certificates to 29, therefore preventing the remaining 508 from obtaining full compensation and services. The Telangana state government, in collaboration with Odisha government officials and NGOs, opened eight Odia language schools that educated approximately 870 former victims of child labor and children of migrant workers. District governments provided stipends for volunteer teachers, meals, and some materials.

Judges could order compensation for victims of all forms of trafficking through other government programs and did so on an ad hoc basis. Prosecutors used protective courtroom procedures for some trafficking victims during the reporting period, including the creation of child friendly courts in Telangana and West Bengal. Video conferencing was used by Hyderabad and Mumbai’s anti-trafficking court in at least one case to allow testimony from victims who had returned to Bangladesh. Many victims were reluctant to participate in trials against their traffickers due to inadequate witness protection and the lengthy judicial process. Female victims of sex trafficking faced systemic barriers in pursuing justice, including victim blaming by law enforcement, challenges to successfully filing FIRs, and poor access to services. Police and court officers did not always follow the victim protection measures enshrined in law. Moreover, NGOs reported that judges closed many cases because the government did not provide adequate financial assistance to enable victims to participate in trials. Foreign victims had the same access to shelter and services as Indian nationals. Government policy on foreign victims dictated their return to their country of origin at the earliest possible time. Authorities detained foreign sex trafficking victims in government-run or government-funded shelters until deportation. At times, both repatriation of foreign victims seeking to return home and deportation of victims could take years due to a number of constraints. The government provided some funding to NGOs to repatriate child trafficking victims but did not offer any financial assistance for repatriation of adult trafficking victims. During the reporting period, the government secured the release and assisted with repatriation of Indian forced labor victims from Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Some law enforcement continued to penalize trafficking victims for unlawful acts their traffickers compelled them to commit, including prostitution and immigration violations. The government required Indians who received a visa from a foreign government indicating the person was a trafficking victim in the foreign country or was a family member of a victim to provide documentation of the trafficking experience in order to renew their passports. In 2016 and 2017, the government stamped the passports of some recipients of the foreign government's visas, for both trafficking victims and their eligible family members, identifying them as trafficking victims involved in a particular investigation or civil or criminal case. While the stamp requested authorities permit the visa holder to travel without hindrance, some NGOs familiar with this practice noted it made some victims fearful of reprisal and penalization and served as a deterrent to victims interacting with authorities. Some victims previously cited lengthy delays, requests from the government for private or otherwise sensitive information, and inconsistent application of the policy when attempting to renew their passports.

## PREVENTION

The government maintained modest efforts to prevent human trafficking at the state level. The government's inter-ministerial committee, chaired by MWCD, did not report meeting during the reporting period; it had met in the previous reporting period. The government did not have a national action plan to combat trafficking. The Ministry of Railways had 84 child help desks at stations to provide immediate support to unaccompanied children who might have been vulnerable to trafficking—an increase from 62 desks the previous year. In some states, police and NGOs noted government agencies largely lacked anti-trafficking preventative measures. Some state governments conducted anti-trafficking awareness campaigns. West Bengal expanded its Swayangsiddha Initiative to all 23 districts, reaching 200,000 students in 500 schools to share information on human trafficking and child rights. The government registered foreign recruitment agencies and Indian migrant workers through the eMigrate system. The government required migrant workers going to 16 specific countries, including many in the Middle East, to receive emigration clearance before departure; it did not allow emigration to Iraq. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) drafted an emigration bill that required all Indian nationals seeking education or employment overseas to register with the government, provided for enhanced pre-departure trainings and migrant resource centers, and prescribed more stringent penalties for recruitment agency violations; the bill was pending submission to Parliament at the close of the reporting period. The government maintained its ban on females younger than age 30 from working in 17 countries. The UN and members of civil society argued any ban on migration increased the likelihood of illegal migration and therefore heightened vulnerability to human traffickers. MEA operated five centers nationwide and a 24/7 helpline to provide counseling and other resources to those considering migrant work. MEA's Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF), accessible to all Indian missions abroad and funded primarily via overseas consular fees, offered shelter, legal assistance, and repatriation for migrant workers in distress, as well as awareness measures and hotlines. MEA did not report data on utilization of this fund during the reporting period. The government permitted licensed foreign employment recruiters to charge migrant

workers up to 20,000 INR (\$287) for recruitment fees and costs; however, observers stated employers frequently charged migrant workers more than the maximum, thereby increasing debt and vulnerability to labor trafficking. Unregistered sub-agents operated widely without oversight. MEA received 231 complaints from January to June 2018 against recruitment agencies and agents and referred the cases to state governments for investigation.

Some states regulated some aspects of work in the informal sector, including domestic work. The central government could provide reimbursement of 450,000 INR (\$6,450) to any district that conducted a census of bonded labor, but no district reported utilizing this incentive during the year. Despite India being a destination for child sex tourism, the government did not report measures to reduce child sex tourism. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex. The government did not provide information about any training provided to its troops prior to their deployment as peacekeepers or to its diplomatic personnel. During the reporting period, a domestic worker filed a civil lawsuit in a federal court in New York seeking damages from a former Indian consular officer previously posted at the New York consulate, whom the domestic worker alleged subjected her to forced labor in 2013-2014.

## TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in India, and traffickers exploit victims from India abroad. Forced labor, including bonded labor, constitutes India's largest trafficking problem; men, women, and children in debt bondage—sometimes inherited from previous generations—are forced to work in agriculture, brick kilns, rice mills, embroidery factories, and stone quarries. Most of India's trafficking problem is internal, with traffickers targeting those from the most disadvantaged social strata. Experts estimate there are more than eight million bonded laborers in the country. In addition to bonded labor, traffickers exploit children in forced labor agriculture; construction; domestic service; garment, steel, and textile industries, including tanneries and *zari* factories; begging; biscuit factories; carpet making; floriculture; fish and ginger farms; glass manufacturing; pickling; ship breaking; and wire manufacturing for underground cables. Forced begging ringleaders sometimes maim children to earn more money. Traffickers have coerced poor parents to give up their children and forced the children to work and in one case steal in large cities. Multiple organizations note physical violence against trafficking victims—in both forced labor and sex trafficking—is particularly prevalent in India. Unregulated work placement agencies reportedly use false promises of employment to lure adults and children into sex trafficking or forced labor. Some traffickers force women and girls to conceive and deliver babies for sale. In some cases, the “Provident Funds” or “Sumangali” scheme in which employers pay young women a lump sum for education or a dowry at the end of multi-year labor contracts, often in Tamil Nadu's spinning mill industry, may amount to bonded labor, and some employers subject these women to sex trafficking. Maoist groups, particularly in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, allegedly continued to recruit children, and three incidents of child recruitment by separatist groups were reported in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. NGO observers reported children as young as age 12 were members of Maoist youth groups and allied militia.

The children reportedly handled weapons and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Maoists reportedly held children against their will and threatened severe reprisals, including the killing of family members, if the children attempted to escape. Maoist groups sometimes used children as human shields in confrontations with security forces. Several women formerly associated with Maoist groups reported that sexual violence, including rape and other forms of abuse, was a practice in some Maoist camps. Some female child soldiers reported commanders recruited and used them in part for sexual exploitation, including practices indicative of sexual slavery. Some parents in Jharkhand send their children to Bihar and Gujarat to avoid abduction and recruitment by armed groups; the children often work on farms and in brick kilns, sectors that render them vulnerable to forced labor. Unverified reports allege national security forces also use children as informants and spies.

Experts estimate millions of people are sex trafficking victims within India. Traffickers exploit women and children in sex trafficking in religious pilgrimage centers and in tourist destinations. Traffickers subject women and girls—predominately from Nepal and Bangladesh and, to a lesser extent, from Europe, Africa, and Asia—to sex trafficking in India. Traffickers exploit Indian and Nepali women and girls in India as “orchestra dancers,” where girls work for dance groups hired to perform at public functions but are subsequently subjected to sex trafficking. Traffickers use online technology to facilitate sex trafficking and fraudulent recruitment. Some traffickers kidnap children from public places, entice girls with drugs, and force girls as young as five years old in sex trafficking to take hormone injections to appear older. Some corrupt law enforcement officers protect suspected traffickers and brothel owners from law enforcement efforts and take bribes from sex trafficking establishments and sexual services from victims. Some traffickers have bribed police to release child sex trafficking victims back into traffickers’ custody. In addition to traditional red light districts, dance bars, spas, and massage parlors, traffickers increasingly exploit women and children in sex trafficking in small hotels, vehicles, huts, and private residences. India is a source for child sex tourists and a destination for child sex tourism. Traffickers arrange sham marriages within India and Gulf states to subject females to sex trafficking. Media, NGOs, and government authorities documented physical and sexual abuse of trafficking victims in government-run, government-funded, and privately-run shelters, as well as cases of shelters forcing vulnerable male, female, and child residents into forced labor and sex trafficking. Victims alleged government officials’ involvement in some of the cases, including facilitating trafficking and—in at least three cases—as clients of victims in sex trafficking.

Traffickers exploit some Indian migrants who willingly seek employment abroad in construction, domestic work, and other low-skilled sectors to forced labor in the Middle East and other regions, often following recruitment fraud and exorbitant recruitment fees. News articles reported Indian males in labor trafficking in Malaysia, Armenia, and Portugal during the reporting period. Girls from northeast India are vulnerable to trafficking as they transit Burma to circumvent the Indian government’s emigration clearances. During the reporting period, new reports emerged of Zambian traffickers bringing Indian children to Zambia through illegal adoption for domestic servitude. Traffickers subject some Indian, Nepali, Bangladeshi, and Afghan women and girls to labor and sex trafficking in major Indian cities, and exploit Rohingya, Sri Lankan Tamil, and other refugee populations in sex and labor trafficking. Some traffickers bribe Indian

immigration officials in New Delhi and Mumbai to allow them to transport Nepali females to the Gulf or Malaysia without proper documentation for forced labor. Traffickers subject some boys from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to forced labor in embroidery factories in Nepal. Employment agents recruit boys from Assam for construction work in Nepal, where workers are undocumented and vulnerable to forced labor.

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