



STARTING OVER

CHILDREN RETURN HOME FROM CAMEL RACING

 1946 - 2006
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Back home with horrifying tales

Camel jockeys return from UAE

TALE OF 6 CAMEL JOCKEYS

Back home with no future in sight

POJUMOL PALMA
At least six children who were abducted and trafficked to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to work as camel jockeys in the UAE, are now living in a DUBAI shelter to be repatriated.



35 child camel jockeys back home, 200 in line

Middlemen lured their parents to UAE, hopes of changing lot dashed

POJUMOL PALMA
The majority of the 35 child camel jockeys who were repatriated to Bangladesh on Tuesday morning, were lured to the UAE by middlemen who promised them a better life in the Gulf.

35 Bangladeshi children used as camel jockeys in UAE return home

Price paid for their parents

POJUMOL PALMA
A group of 35 Bangladeshi children used as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have returned home to Bangladesh.

Camel jockey Saddam returns to mother's lap after 5 yrs

BDNEWS, Bhairab

Saddam Hossain (10), who worked as a camel jockey in

Robots to replace jockeys in UAE camel race

The UAE will soon use robots to replace jockeys in camel races, officials say.



Camel jockey returns to mother's lap

Saddam Hossain, 10, who was used as a camel jockey in Dubai, returned to his mother's lap in Bangladesh on Tuesday.

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6 camel jockeys

POJUMOL PALMA
Six more children who were abducted and trafficked to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to work as camel jockeys in the UAE, are now living in a DUBAI shelter to be repatriated.

35 child back home

POJUMOL PALMA
A group of 35 child camel jockeys who were repatriated to Bangladesh on Tuesday morning, were lured to the UAE by middlemen who promised them a better life in the Gulf.

22 more camel jockeys back home

POJUMOL PALMA
A second group of 22 child camel jockeys who were repatriated to Bangladesh on Tuesday morning, were lured to the UAE by middlemen who promised them a better life in the Gulf.

58 camel jockeys yet to return to parents

JAGARAN CHAKMA
Bangladesh Jatiya Mohila Aajib Samity (BJMAS) is yet to hand over 58 out of 225 children who were used as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), to their parents due to legal complexity.

No child to be trafficked from Asia

Says UAE top cop on camel jockeys

POJUMOL PALMA
Inquire about the former camel jockeys who had been repatriated to Bangladesh. At least 164 children

Back home with horrifying tales

36 camel jockeys return from UAE

STAR CORRESPONDENT
Thirty-six Bangladeshi children who were used as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have returned home to Bangladesh on Tuesday morning.



Some of the recently returned camel jockeys at a shelter home in the capital.

A DIFFERENT TALE OF CAMEL JOCKEY BROTHERS

They now don't know how to start life anew

POJUMOL PALMA
Obaidullah and his younger brother Dalim cannot now dream of anything as a better work, working as jockeys, going to cinema and roaming around in their native places.

36 child jockeys return home from UAE

Tale of ordeals moves every listener

STAR CORRESPONDENT
A group of 36 Bangladeshi children who were used as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have returned home to Bangladesh on Tuesday morning.



Some of the 22 Bangladeshi children used as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates at Za International Airport on their return home yesterday.

22 more jockeys return

STAR CORRESPONDENT
Twenty-two more Bangladeshi children who were used as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) arrived at the Za International Airport (ZAI) in Dhaka on Tuesday.

22 more jockeys

STAR CORRESPONDENT
Twenty-two more Bangladeshi children who were used as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) arrived at the Za International Airport (ZAI) in Dhaka on Tuesday.

Kids as jockeys

By a rare quirk of good fortune the hapless children have got another chance. With timely intervention by organizations like UNICEF and BHA these children are saved from being lost for ever.

36 jockey kids return home

STAR CORRESPONDENT
Thirty-six Bangladeshi children who were used as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have returned home to Bangladesh on Tuesday morning.

Local news articles and editorials provided wide coverage of children involved in camel racing.

STARTING OVER

CHILDREN RETURN HOME FROM CAMEL RACING

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The UNICEF Gulf Area Office would like to thank everyone who contributed to this report. Sincere thanks go to all our partners, including Col. Najm Sayyar Alhosani and his colleagues at the Ministry of Interior of the United Arab Emirates; the UNICEF teams and their partners in Bangladesh, Mauritania, Pakistan and Sudan; and Alexia Lewnes, who compiled this report. Our special gratitude goes to H.H. Lt. General Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Interior of the United Arab Emirates, and the Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation, for their invaluable leadership and support in realizing this project.

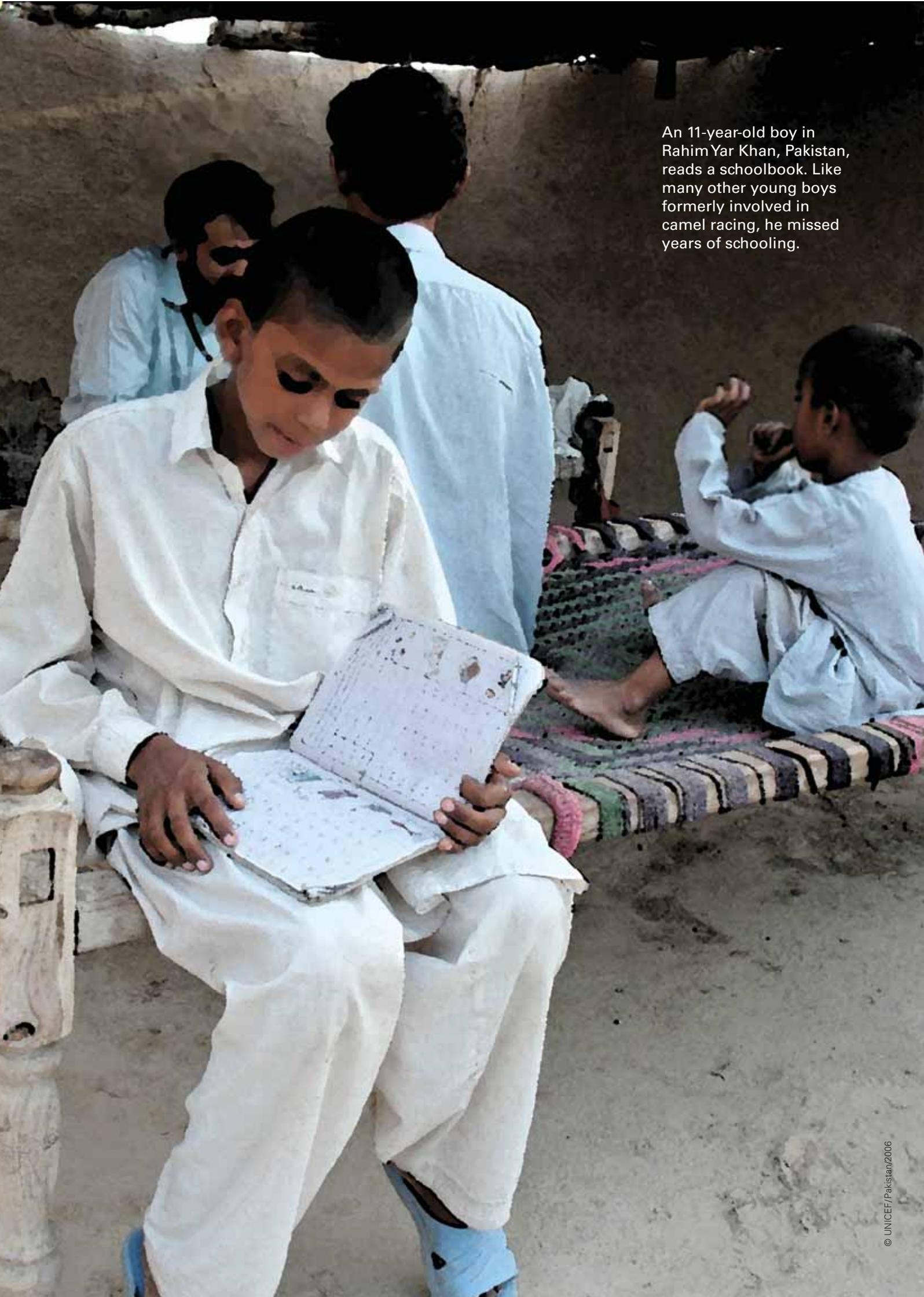
© The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2006

In order to protect their identity, the names of the children and families used in this publication have been changed, and their visual identity has been obscured.

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Cover photo: Jodi Cobb/National Geographic Image Collection



An 11-year-old boy in Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan, reads a schoolbook. Like many other young boys formerly involved in camel racing, he missed years of schooling.

A HISTORIC INITIATIVE ADVANCES CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

In May 2005, UNICEF and the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed a groundbreaking agreement to return children formerly involved in camel racing to their countries of origin and reintegrate them into their communities. Government and non-governmental organization (NGO) delegates from Bangladesh, Mauritania, Pakistan and Sudan committed their support to helping the children who returned home to re-enter society.

This historic initiative is the first programme in the Gulf region to publicly acknowledge the issues of child trafficking and exploitation, and take practical steps to protect children. By strengthening legislation and policies, the programme prevents the trafficking and exploitation of children for use in camel racing, and protects and assists young victims. Acknowledging that no state can end child trafficking alone, it engages international partners, including those countries from which children are trafficked.

The project to repatriate children formerly involved in camel racing from the UAE demonstrates that political will and government commitment can produce results and make a real and lasting difference in children's lives. Furthermore, it has encouraged citizens of the UAE to speak openly about sensitive issues and to break the silence surrounding domestic violence and other child rights violations. This is an important step in advancing the cause of children's rights – in this case, the right of every child to be free from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse.

Although many lessons have already been learned, the initiative continues to be a work in progress with additional challenges still to be addressed. The framework, however, is a strong model of national and regional partnership that aims to inspire other countries to develop similar forms of cooperation. Building partnerships across national borders can help ensure that child trafficking and all forms of exploitation will not be tolerated. In addition, it creates an environment where children are protected and their well-being becomes the collective responsibility of all nations.

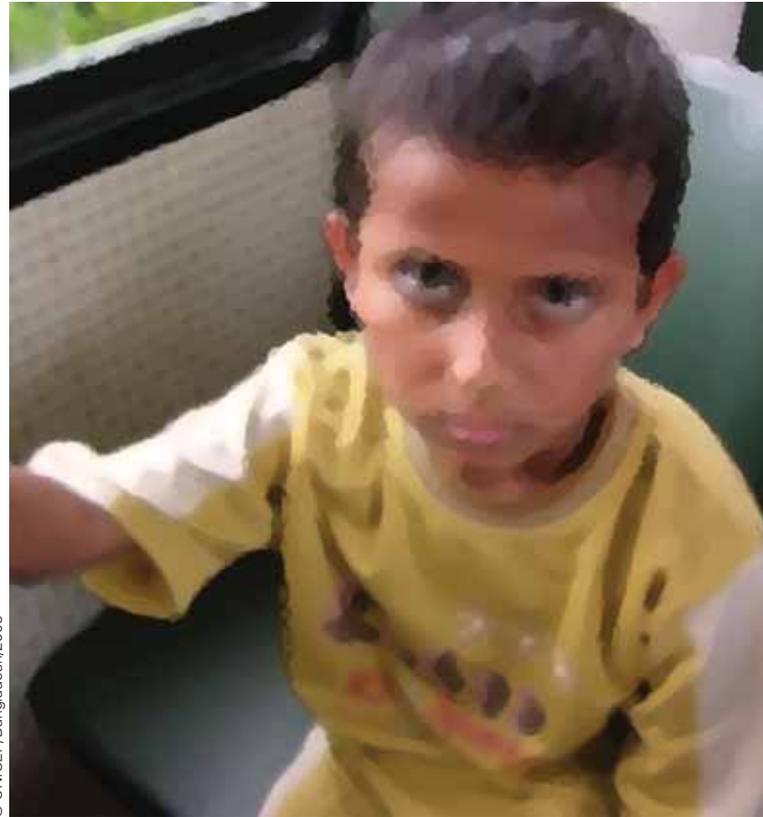
"The first time, everybody feels bad. When the camel was jumping, I couldn't manage it, and I was scared."

GOPALAN, A FORMER CAMEL JOCKEY FROM BANGLADESH

A tradition becomes a multimillion-dollar industry

The sport of camel racing has long been a cherished part of culture in the Arabian Peninsula. Short, 500-metre sprints marked important social events, religious festivals, weddings and visits by prominent tribal leaders. When competitive races were held, their owners, mainly the family's children, rode the camels.

As oil wealth rapidly transformed the region, many aspects of traditional life began to fade away. In an effort to preserve their national heritage, ruling sheikhs started to



© UNICEF/Bangladesh/2005

Children involved in camel racing face many hazards. Separated from their families, they risk injury and death, are often deliberately underfed, get little rest and may be beaten or sexually abused.

CHILD TRAFFICKING DEFINED

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (known as the 'Palermo Protocol') defines a child as "any person under eighteen years of age." Trafficking is defined as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person [in this instance a child, either within or outside a country] for the purpose of exploitation.... Exploitation shall include at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."

When children are trafficked, no violence, deception or coercion needs to be involved; the act of transporting them into exploitative work constitutes trafficking.



© Kiran/UNICEF/Map

promote the sport and awarded prizes to the owners of winning camels. Special racetracks were built, races were organized and trainers and labourers were recruited from countries in South Asia and North Africa to work on camel farms. In 1992, the Camel Racing Association was established to develop and regulate national racing standards throughout the seven emirates.

During racing season, newspapers published the results and television brought the sport to homes throughout the country. The value of prizes for winning camels grew, as did the prestige of owning a winner. Over time, camel racing developed into a multimillion-dollar industry, encompassing thoroughbred breeding programmes, camel hospitals and lucrative cash prizes.

Children as jockeys

The use of expatriate children as camel jockeys, almost exclusively small boys, dates back to the 1970s. Young boys were preferred since the smaller and lighter the burden, the faster the camels could run. Boys were initially brought from Oman and Sudan, and later from Pakistan and other countries in North Africa and South Asia. The Cholistan Desert in Pakistan's Rahim Yar Khan District, where camels are used for travel and trade, became a popular recruiting spot. The desert, known for its excellent hunting, attracted Arab sheikhs, and camel races were organized during their visits, with local people in the area taking an active part in the races on a regular basis.¹

In the UAE, expatriate trainers, managers and other labourers who worked on camel farms began to earn extra income by using their own children to ride camels, and these workers helped arrange for others to be brought into the country. As the sport developed into a commercial enterprise, the demand for jockeys grew. In time, the trafficking of children for use as camel jockeys in the Gulf States became a lucrative business, involving complex, often illicit networks, fueled by poverty, greed and corruption.

Children who were used as camel jockeys in the UAE usually came from poor communities with few opportunities for education or employment. They travelled with their fathers, uncles, older brothers or other relatives who were seeking employment on camel farms. Some children were given to 'agents' by family members or friends, who may have been deceived by false promises or were convinced that the work would provide much-needed income. Many didn't realize the hazards their children would face.

¹ Ashghar, Syed Mehmood, Sabir Farhat and Shereen Niaz, *Camel Jockeys of Rahimyar Khan: Findings of a participatory research on the life and situation of child camel jockeys*, Save the Children Sweden, Pakistan Programme, Peshawar, 2005, p. 4.

“I cracked my head in one of the falls [during the races] and had to get stitches in three places. My brother also fell, and the camels stepped on his stomach. His abdomen swelled up and out in every direction...”

NADIR, A 9-YEAR-OLD FORMER CAMEL JOCKEY FROM PAKISTAN

A hazardous life

The children who were used as camel jockeys were robbed of their childhood and of their future. Strapped onto the backs of camels that could weigh more than 400 kilograms, the child jockeys raced around a 10-kilometre course at speeds approaching 50 kilometres per hour. The boys were usually between 4 and 10 years old, and their terrified screams were ignored. They were often injured and disabled in falls, and at times trampled to death during the dangerous races. They were often deliberately underfed to keep their weight down so the camels could run faster; they got little rest and trained long hours in sweltering heat; some were beaten and sexually abused.²

Many of these children were separated from their parents at a very young age and were forced to grow up in a country where the people, language and culture were completely unknown to them. Some forgot where they had come from, or could not even remember their parents. They did not attend school or learn practical skills to survive outside of the camel farms.

Exposing the worst forms of child labour

Since 1980, UAE’s Federal Labour Code has banned the employment of any child younger than 15. The Government has also ratified a number of international conventions that prohibit child trafficking and exploitation, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and International Labour Conventions No. 138 on the ‘Minimum Age for Admission to Employment’ and No. 182 on the ‘Worst Forms of Child Labour’ – defined in article 3 (d) as “work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.”

The existence of national and international laws, however, did little to stop the practice. As the camel industry flourished, children involved in camel racing drew increasing attention. UAE citizens began to criticize the commercialization of their national heritage, and accidents during the camel races, publicized by local and international media, placed the hazards of racing in the spotlight.

The UAE Government responded in 2002 by passing specific legislation to ban children under age 15 or weighing less than 45 kilograms from being employed in camel racing. The International Labour Organization called on the government to raise the minimum age to 18, and to establish severe penalties for those trafficking children for this purpose.

“We were not seeing the issue as a child rights violation or as trafficking,” says Colonel Najim A. Alhosani, Director of the Community Policing Department, Ministry of Interior in Abu Dhabi. “The parents often gave permission for the children to race; the father and [other] caregivers encouraged it. People here were supporting it as a way to preserve [our] national heritage. They didn’t know that children were being brought into the country with documentation that falsified their ages and with fake parents.”

² Information based on medical records and interviews with children.

A MOTHER'S ANGUISH



Forty-two-year-old Farida sent her two sons to work on camel farms in the United Arab Emirates for eight years. The family was already struggling to repay loans and support six children in Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan, when her husband was diagnosed with cancer. While her sons were away, Farida's husband died. In the following, she describes her family's experience:

"I was washing clothes one day when two men from a nearby village came and offered to take our sons to work in the UAE. They said, 'Your husband is sick and you have no regular job'. The men came again and again, persuading us to accept their offer. I didn't agree to their proposal, but my husband said we should send our two sons, Iqbal and Saeed, so we could repay our loans.

"We committed to pay 70,000 rupees [at current rates around US\$1,171] to the agents for our journey. I went with Iqbal, who was seven, and Saeed, who was four. The agents took us across the border into Iran and then by plane to UAE. On the day we arrived, we were given 15,000 dirhams [US\$4,100] for the two boys.

"My sons earned 500 dirhams [US\$137] per month each. For the first year, all the wages went to paying the agents' fee. In the second year we received about 4,000 dirhams [US\$1,093] every three or four months. We used the money to pay for the weddings of our three oldest children and to pay back loans.

"I returned three times to UAE to visit my sons. On one visit I found my younger son, Saeed, locked in a room with ropes tied tight around his abdomen. He had infected wounds from the ropes. He was being punished for gaining weight. I exploded in fury at the manager, and threatened to tie him up with my dupatta [shawl] to see how it felt. He just told me I was a mad woman.

"Saeed is now going to school with monthly assistance from the Child Protection Welfare Bureau. He's been given a bicycle for his transport. My older son, Iqbal, is 16 and too old for school. He earns 100 rupees [US\$1.67] a day as a stonemason. If he goes to school, who is going to support our family?"

PREVENTING CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT IN CAMEL RACING IN THE UAE

March 2005

Sheikh Hamdan Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister, issues a decree to formally prohibit the recruitment of children as camel jockeys who are less than 16 years old and weigh less than 45 kilograms.

May 2005

The UAE Ministry of Interior and UNICEF sign an agreement that provides US\$2.7 million to help children formerly involved in camel racing return and reintegrate in their home communities. Representatives from Bangladesh, Mauritania, Pakistan and Sudan agree to develop action plans to receive the children in their host countries.

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June 2005

The Social Support Centre in Abu Dhabi begins to receive children. About 180 children housed in temporary shelters are moved to the centre.

July 2005

A federal law prohibits the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18 as camel jockeys. Violators face jail terms of up to three years and/or a fine of 50,000 dirhams (US\$13,670). All persons participating in camel racing must receive a certificate verifying their age from the Camel Jockey Federation.

September 2005

Robot jockeys are used at the start of the camel racing season.



© UNICEF/Bangladesh/2005

When children are trafficked, no violence, deception or coercion needs to be involved. The act of transporting them into exploitative work constitutes trafficking.

Taking action

In October 2004, the Ministry of Interior in the United Arab Emirates established a section to oversee camel racing within the immigration department. More than 100 members of the ministry staff were assigned to investigate and monitor the camel-racing tracks and farms. In coordination with the Camel Racing Union, all official racetracks were registered and screened in search of expatriate children.

The exploitative nature of camel racing and the human trafficking network that supported it became increasingly obvious. At that time, the Ministry of Interior estimated that around 3,000 children were on the camel farms; 2,800 of them (93 per cent) were less than 10 years old. UAE authorities discovered that most of the children were from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sudan, with far fewer children originating from Eritrea and Mauritania.

In March 2005, the UAE Government issued a decree that formally prohibited recruiting children who were younger than 16 and weighed less than 45 kilograms into camel racing. The sponsors of children working as camel jockeys had one month to submit a list of their underage employees.

That same month, a high-level government meeting was held to discuss how to stop the use of children as camel jockeys and return them to their homes. Participants agreed they needed an international partner experienced in working with children and human rights, and which had the ability to manage a project, and monitor and evaluate the results. Thus, they called on UNICEF to provide guidance and technical support.

“We didn’t want to just collect all the children and send them back home with nothing. We wanted to address this in a humanitarian way and to solve the problem at the source.”

**COLONEL NAJIM A. ALHOSANI, DIRECTOR OF THE COMMUNITY POLICING DEPARTMENT,
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, ABU DHABI**

In May 2005, the UAE Government, UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration, and delegates from governments and non-governmental groups from Bangladesh, Mauritania, Pakistan and Sudan met to review steps needed to remove children from camel racing and assist their return home. Representatives agreed to create individualized country action plans, and a committee was established to monitor camel racing and follow up implementation of the project. Committee members include UNICEF, the department of immigration and the infiltration unit of UAE’s Ministry of Interior, and the human rights division of the Dubai police department.

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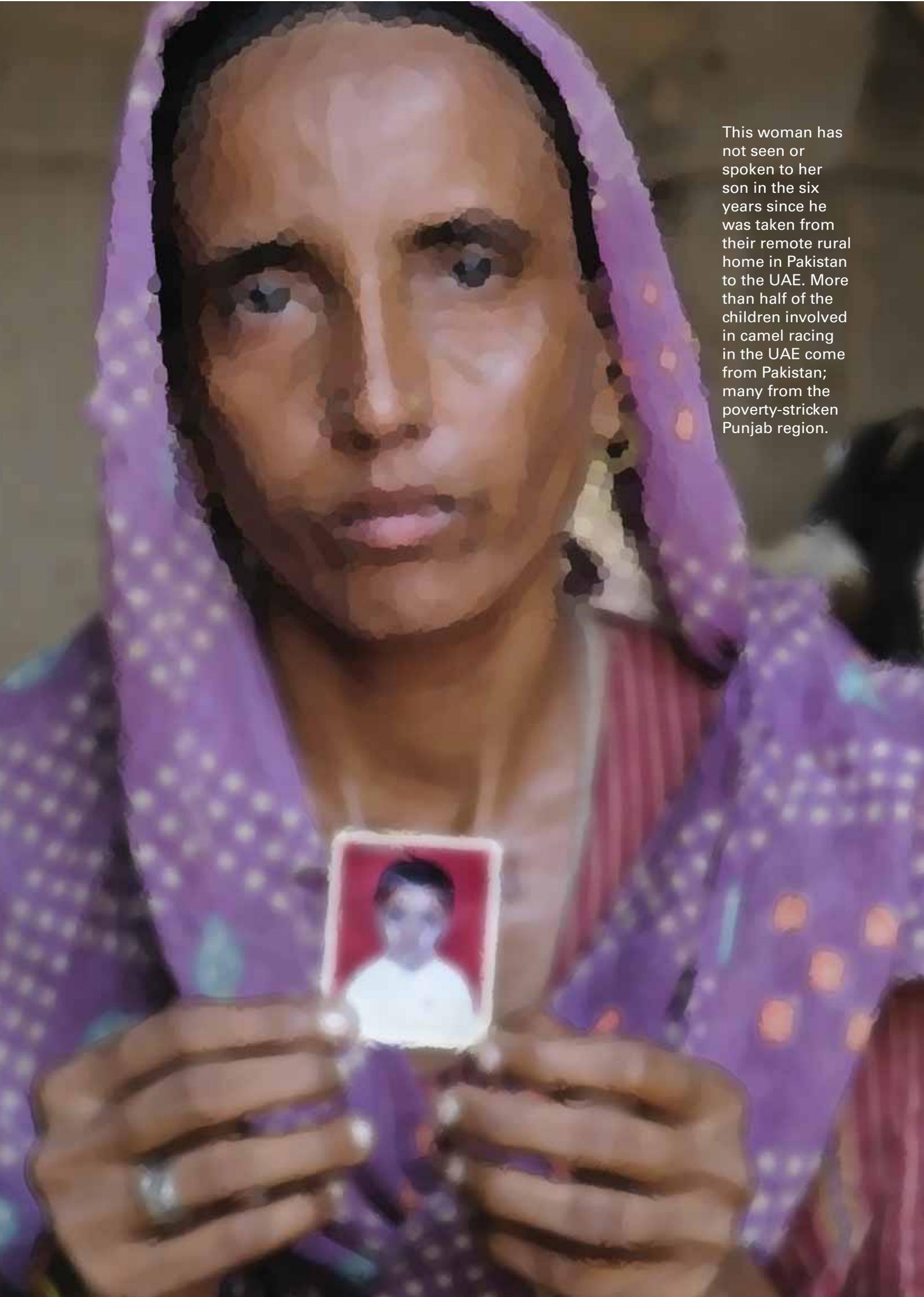
At the end of the two-day meeting, the Ministry of Interior and UNICEF signed an agreement to provide US\$2.7 million to support the return and reintegration of children formerly involved in camel racing. As the focal point for the initiative, the Ministry agreed to identify all children working on camel farms; provide them with accommodation and rehabilitation services in transit centres; collect the children’s back wages and entitlements from the farms; and contact embassies to arrange for the children’s repatriation.

The UNICEF Gulf Area Office agreed to provide technical support and guidance in the identification and registration of children; to assess and build the national capacity of UAE service providers who worked directly with the children; and to facilitate the repatriation process. The project proceeded in three phases – recovering the children from the camel farms, arranging for transit to shelter and repatriating them to their home countries.

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Top: After working on a camel farm for three years, this 9-year-old boy returned to Pakistan, where his father described him as being ‘mentally disturbed.’
Bottom: A child formerly involved in camel racing is welcomed at a reintegration meeting in Raipura Village, Bangladesh. These gatherings are an important element in helping children readjust to their communities.



This woman has not seen or spoken to her son in the six years since he was taken from their remote rural home in Pakistan to the UAE. More than half of the children involved in camel racing in the UAE come from Pakistan; many from the poverty-stricken Punjab region.

PHASE 1: RECOVERY

In July 2005, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, issued a new federal law that prohibits the recruitment and use of children under age 18 as camel jockeys. Violators face jail terms of up to three years and/or a fine of 50,000 dirhams (US\$13,670). All persons participating in camel racing are required to verify their age by acquiring a certificate from the medical committee of the Camel Jockey Federation.

To publicize the new law, brochures in Arabic and English were distributed to all farms and racetracks, and announcements were broadcast by radio and television stations across the country. Investigators from the Ministry of Interior visited camel farms and met with sponsors and farm owners to ensure that they understood the seriousness and legal implications of the new legislation. Lectures and meetings for organizers and others who help manage the races were conducted at the Federal Union for Camel Racing.



© UNICEF/United Arab Emirates/2005

Sponsors and owners were given a two-month grace period to voluntarily bring children to be registered at temporary reception centres. During this period, between 500 and 600 children were registered. Spot inspections of farms were strengthened, and sponsors were arrested when it was determined that the children had not been registered within the time requirement.

Responding to growing concern that sponsors might try to hide or get rid of children illegally to avoid prosecution, the government extended the amnesty period an additional two months. A total of 1,075 children were eventually registered by the UAE Government.

More than 90 per cent of the estimated 3,000 children involved in camel racing are less than 10 years old. In the UAE, a federal law issued in July 2005 bans the recruitment and use of children under 18 as camel jockeys.

PHASE 2: TRANSIT SHELTER

The Social Support Centre in Abu Dhabi, recently established by the Ministry of Interior to address family problems and school violence, became the appointed guardian for the children and coordinated all support services in other emirates and within the ministry.

A local school was converted into a transit shelter to receive the children who had no guardians.³ Children with families were placed in a different building, where they received the same services. The Centre was staffed with six social workers who provided psychosocial support, social services and case management. To manage the large numbers of children, 75 policy officers (women and men), worked in shifts as caregivers.

“These children had been raised with the camels, and that’s the only life they knew. Many of them had never seen a woman before. At first, they wanted to go back to be with the camels, but in time they developed a strong relationship with us.”

SOCIAL WORKER, SOCIAL SUPPORT CENTRE, ABU DHABI

Children who came to the transit shelter were registered and received medical checkups. A number of children suffered from tuberculosis, hepatitis B and C, and scabies and other skin diseases. Many were undernourished, and up to 60 per cent of children exhibited signs of stunted growth. Each child received full medical care, and some children were hospitalized and received treatment at the sponsor’s expense. Age assessments determined that the majority of the children were between 3 and 10 years old.

The social workers faced enormous challenges. Most of the children spoke Urdu, the language of the camel trainers and other workers, making it difficult for the Arabic-speaking social workers and police officers to communicate with them. The children didn’t like wearing shoes and were accustomed to sleeping on the floor. Many didn’t know how to wash themselves or use the bathroom. Several children had been abused, some sexually, often by the older children. Their symptoms of aggressiveness, depression, hyperactivity and bed-wetting reflected the trauma they had endured. The children were given psychosocial and social counselling, and were taught how to bathe properly and use the toilet facilities. They also played sports in the backyard and participated in other recreational activities, including community picnics. Social workers conducted basic classes in Arabic, mathematics and the Holy Koran. They established case files for each child to facilitate and individualize the repatriation process.

The children stayed at the Social Support Centre until their parents or legal guardians were identified, a process that took from 2 weeks to 10 months. Those children who arrived with their families were most quickly processed. Others were left at the door of the shelter, and locating their guardians required time-consuming investigative work.

³ Initially, two temporary shelters were opened, one for older children at Swaihan Military Camp, and one for families and their children at Al-Mafraq Juvenile Detention Centre. These were closed after a few months once the school became ready to receive the children.

PHASE 3: REPATRIATION



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Shelter homes, such as this one in Dhaka, provide temporary housing for children formerly involved in camel racing until their parents or legal guardians are identified.

Family tracing

Tracing the children's families began in the UAE, where officials investigated the people who had been with the children on the farms. Investigators used travel documents, residency permits, bank accounts and phone numbers to trace parents and other relatives. Some cases were extremely complex, especially those involving young children and children who had entered the country with 'fake parents'. Many of these children could not remember who their real parents were or where they had come from. DNA testing was used to determine the relationship between the children and their guardians.

Information on each child was sent to country embassies, which assisted in the identification process and followed up with local authorities to verify the child's identity and trace the family. The Governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh went a step further and sent missions to Abu Dhabi to help determine which children were from their respective countries and then arrange for their repatriation.

The embassies issued passports or outpasses to the majority of children who had no documentation, and the UAE Immigration Department established a temporary unit within the Social Support Centre to facilitate and expedite the issuance of exit visas and the processing of other necessary documents. Some children were returned to their home countries and placed in transit centres while family tracing continued.



The journey home should be a happy one for children formerly involved in camel racing. But many are recovering from physical and emotional trauma, and may be terrified of being sent away again.

To avoid overwhelming the capacities of the government agencies and NGOs that were to handle the cases, representatives from the UAE Government escorted the children to their home countries in small groups. The first group of children arrived in Pakistan in June 2005, just one month after the intercountry meeting was held in the UAE.

One year into the programme, 96 per cent of all children repatriated through the UAE-UNICEF-NGO coordination mechanism had been reunified with their families. Only 21 children were still in transit care, their families yet to be identified.

Paying children's back wages

From the start of the programme, it was decided that the sponsors would be required to pay all the children's back wages. A few of the children had actually been paid for their work as jockeys and arrived at the Social Support Centre with money in hand. In most cases, however, their earnings were transferred into the bank accounts of parents, relatives or other sponsors in the children's home countries. The children were entitled to receive an average salary of 1,000 dirhams (US\$273) per month, and some children were reportedly owed as much as 80,000 dirhams (US\$21,870) in back pay.

The children and their sponsors were questioned, and records and payments were verified. Any money owed to a child was placed in a bank account in the UAE until the

child returned home. Once families were identified, they were asked to open bank accounts in their child's name. Only those parents who lived in remote areas or who were not able to open accounts were personally handed their children's earnings by staff from the UAE Social Support Centre.

Under the agreement with UNICEF, the UAE had also agreed to contribute US\$1,000 for each child into a fund established in each country. Most of the money would be used to pay for the children's school fees or vocational training and transportation. The remainder would cover costs associated with reintegration and rehabilitation services, such as temporary shelter, food and clothing.

"It's good to be back, but I do feel a bit strange, and we do not know what to expect. We will have to find a way to build a life for ourselves here."

BAASIM, 16 YEARS OLD, AT HOME IN BANGLADESH AFTER BEING INVOLVED IN CAMEL RACING IN THE UAE FOR MORE THAN 10 YEARS



A SECOND CHANCE ON RETURNING HOME

Saleem was four years old when his family sent him with a female 'agent' to work as a camel jockey on a farm near Abu Dhabi. After working in the UAE for eight years, in February 2005 he returned to his home – a hamlet 30 kilometres east of Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan. Here, he speaks about his life and plans for the future:

“My left thigh was broken and mutilated while I was away. I need a stick to walk now and must drag my left leg. I cannot play sports. I have trouble urinating. At night the pain stops me from sleeping, but it doesn't stop me from going to school. In fact, I go to two schools. By day I attend the government primary school. In the afternoons, after classes, I go to the madrasa for religious study. All day I am busy learning. I love it.”

“I travel to both my schools on the bicycle I received from the Child Protection Welfare Bureau.... I manage to ride the bike with one leg. Next month, they will start giving me 600 rupees [US\$10] each month to cover extra school costs. I have a plan to form a youth group who will study and work together for development of our area. I want to grow up to be a gentleman.”

“Our home has electricity and four rooms for our family of 17. Our source of income now is from my three older brothers, who earn 100 rupees [US\$1.67] a day when they get labouring work. My older brothers got married while I was away. I've come home to baby nieces and nephews. I love nestling them in my arm and bouncing them on my knee. I have little brothers who I'd never met before. I thank God for reuniting me with my family.”



Left: Saleem shows the massive scar on his thigh, the result of an attack by a farm supervisor. Middle: Saleem and his father examine one of the dozens of X-rays of the boy's injury. Child jockeys may be injured, disabled or even trampled to death during the dangerous races. Right: In Pakistan, returning children and their families received a variety of reintegration benefits.

BACK HOME

Each country set up its own coordination mechanism to receive and reintegrate the children into their communities, while family tracing continues for those children who had not yet been identified.

Bangladesh: The Ministry of Home Affairs coordinated the process of repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation of the children and, in a number of cases, of family members who had also been repatriated. Two NGOs, the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association and the Dhaka Ahsania Mission, were responsible for transit care and family tracing. The Police Special Branch, working closely with community police, also played a significant role in the tracing process.

All repatriated children were provided with psychosocial support, legal assistance and medical care during their short-term stay in shelter homes. Because many of the children could not speak Bangla, their birth language, the NGOs provided language training to help children reconnect with their families and ease their transition back into their communities. In cases where a child's family could not be identified, the child stayed in the shelter home until an alternative option was identified.

Community Care Committees, consisting of neighbours, family members, local government and NGO representatives and teachers, were established to oversee the reintegration process and support the children and their families once they returned home. One of the main responsibilities of the committees is to manage the money given by the UAE Government to assist each child repatriated under the programme. Guided by experienced NGOs, the committees assess the needs of every child and create individualized plans for the use of these funds. No cash is paid to the child or family; the money is to be used to improve the family's situation in a way that will benefit the child.

Mauritania: A committee was established to welcome and reintegrate the fewer than two dozen children who were working as camel jockeys. Before each child was repatriated, a justice official had to verify that their family had been identified.

Pakistan: The Government took direct responsibility for all tracing and reintegration through its Child Protection and Welfare Bureau. The children, the vast majority from Rahim Yar Khan and the surrounding districts of Punjab Province, were placed in child protection institutions, large facilities established for the care of destitute and neglected children. All children received a medical exam and had access to educational and recreational facilities. A full-time child psychologist supervised activities at the centre in Lahore.

Before the children could be returned to their families, the Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act 2004 required that all parents appear in Child Protection Court with a verification letter so that they could be assigned legal custody.

Returning children and their families were entitled to a variety of reintegration benefits, including schooling or vocational training, and were aided by a cash grant totalling about US\$10 per month, usually conditional upon successful attendance at school or training. All children also received a bicycle. Community-based integrated programmes have been initiated in a few clusters in Rahim Yar Khan District, where a relatively large number of children have returned. The objective is to help improve the livelihoods of all residents and thereby prevent future trafficking.

Sudan: Sudanese children were rapidly reunited with their families. In fact, the majority were repatriated before the July 2005 law had been implemented. Most of the children formerly involved in camel racing came from the Rashayda tribe, based in eastern



Sudan's Kassala state. Camel racing is part of the Rashayda heritage, with races held during traditional festivals. Many of these children had travelled to the UAE with their fathers, who placed the boys on camel farms; most of the families knew where their children were located.

When the Rashayda community in the UAE learned that children would no longer be allowed to work as jockeys, community members collected the children from the farms and arranged to send them home. Tribal leaders took responsibility for all transit care, tracing and reunification – and through Rashayda community networks in the UAE and Sudan, parents were informed of their children's arrival dates and families were rapidly reunified. When transit care was necessary, it was only for a few days, and shelter was provided by Rashayda community leaders in Khartoum.

United Arab Emirates: As the country addresses child trafficking, community awareness has also been raised about other human rights issues. In March 2006, UAE's first human rights association was formed and registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs as an independent NGO to address these issues in the country. A Higher Committee for Family Affairs has been established in Abu Dhabi to strengthen the role of NGOs and other agencies involved in implementing child rights.

"This project has opened the door to talk about other issues relating to children," says Colonel Najim A. Alhosani. "We are now talking much more about violence in the home and violence in schools and taking steps to stop it."

In Bangladesh, a woman clutches her grandson on his return home after several years working abroad in camel racing.



Children formerly involved in camel racing return home to Bangladesh after working in the UAE. Some children have forgotten their parents and where they came from, and face the daunting task of relearning their language and culture.

A slow and difficult process

It is still too soon to evaluate how the children who are back in their communities will adapt over the long term. Many from Bangladesh and Sudan didn't speak their native language and were unable to communicate with their families when they returned home, leaving them feeling isolated and disconnected – and increasing their vulnerability to further abuse and exploitation.

In Bangladesh, the majority of children have returned to school, but the transition for older children has not been easy. So far, there is no 'catch-up' education for these adolescents, and they find it frustrating to learn in classrooms with much younger children. Some are also finding it difficult to make new friends, preferring to maintain friendships with other children formerly involved in camel racing.

The majority of children interviewed in Pakistan said they prefer going to school rather than working on the camel farms. Adolescents regret not being able to earn money as they used to, but they are happy to be with their families.

The camel racing project is still very much a work in progress. While the reintegration processes are progressing in Bangladesh and Pakistan, further coordination and follow-up are required in Mauritania and Sudan. Monitoring in the UAE will be required to counter as yet unsubstantiated reports that, in remote desert areas, camel racing involving children may be continuing in a clandestine manner. Still, lessons learned over the past year can benefit other countries. Many of the difficulties underscore the enormous challenges trafficking presents and highlight complex child protection issues.

This project involved governments from five countries, which created substantial challenges to managing and coordinating information between countries. The most significant consequence is that discrepancies exist between the number of children originally estimated to have been in the sphere of camel racing in the UAE, and the number received by their home countries. One possible explanation is that many children returned home directly through unofficial means.

The need to make certain that effective mechanisms are in place between countries to coordinate and accurately monitor the process cannot be overstated.

Most families apparently gave their permission to send their children to work in camel racing. Thus, determining whether returning children to their homes is in their best interests must be an important part of any repatriation process. Serious challenges remain to ensuring that these repatriated children are not re-trafficked.

Entire communities must be educated about the dangers of trafficking and other forms of child exploitation, so that they perceive it as harmful and are not seduced by the promises and tricks used by intermediaries who take advantage of the poor and uneducated. Youth must have access to education, training and employment opportunities, so they don't see trafficking as their only option or glamorize camel racing and its prospects. Alternative opportunities to generate income are also essential, so that families may live in dignity.

TRAFFICKING PREVENTION IN THE AFFECTED COUNTRIES

The affected countries have strengthened legislation and policies that prevent the trafficking and exploitation of children for use in camel racing and protect and assist young victims. The initiative is a model of national and regional partnership, with countries working in cooperation to protect children and families.

Bangladesh

- Guidance and operational support for the successful repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of children provided by the Children Involved in Camel Racing Committee (composed of government officials, NGOs and international organizations)
- Community Care Committees that work with the local government and police to support children and their families and monitor their status

Mauritania

- Legislation to prohibit trafficking in persons
- A new Children's Code to protect the welfare of minors

Pakistan

- Monitoring and combating of trafficking in the Punjab province by an interministerial committee
- Federal and provincial steering committees on prevention of trafficking
- Training of law enforcement agencies to ensure that effective services that protect the rights of children are provided at exit and entry points
- Engaging parents and other community members in integrated development processes for better schooling, improved health, vocational education and income-generating opportunities.

Sudan

- Recommendations made to the government on strengthening legislation, policy and procedure by a National Committee on Trafficking, which includes representatives from government ministries, NGOs and UNICEF
- Tightened regulations for passport and visa procedures
- Raising of the age requirement for working visas to 18 years
- Age verification of young people who apply for overseas working visas by a police medical committee

United Arab Emirates

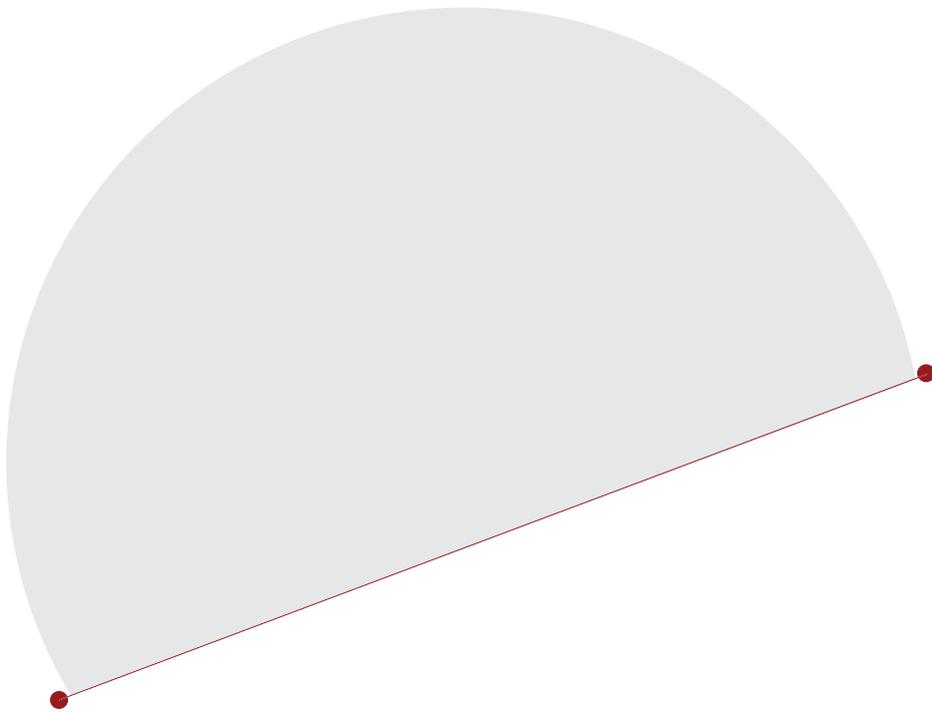
- Legislation to ban children from camel racing
- Monitoring of official racetracks
- Strengthened immigration regulations
- DNA testing to prove parentage of the guardians of underage jockeys
- Retinal testing for all repatriated/deported cases and rules to prevent their re-entry into the country for at least two years
- Development of robots for use in camel races

It should be noted that in Bangladesh and Pakistan, the parents of repatriated children must sign a pledge that they will not send their child away again. In Mauritania, although signing an official document is not required, parents are met by officials and must verbally pledge that they will not send their child away again.

In addition to the print version of the report, *Starting Over: Children return home from camel racing* is also available on CD-ROM accompanied by a video highlighting the work that UNICEF and partners have done in addressing this complex area of child trafficking and child protection.

Minimum technical requirements:

- Internet Explorer 5.5 (for optimum results, use Internet Explorer 6 or higher)
- Macromedia Flash 6 or higher (for videos)
- Adobe® Acrobat® (for PDF downloads)





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