

Saving children from hard labour



BY Amy Fallon

IN BANGLADESH

millions of children work to survive.

Despite a law that says they can't work until they're 14, millions, some as young as eight, have jobs and don't go to school.

Most child labourers (nearly 93 per cent) work in small factories, as maids or servants, or make a living on the streets, UNICEF says.

Mohammad Mamun, 11, is what is known as a "lost boy" in the Asian country, which has a huge population of 160 million people.

SEPARATED FROM MUM

Three years ago Mohammad and his mother travelled from Sylhet, a city in north Bangladesh, to the capital, Dhaka, a city of about 15 million people, about 250 kilometres away.

Mohammad was separated from his mother at the railway station and hasn't seen her since.

No one came to his rescue and Mohammad became one of Dhaka's "railway children", begging, carrying travellers' luggage and relying on tips to survive.

"I would pass my nights sleeping on the street and get skin diseases," he says. "I had no proper food or water."

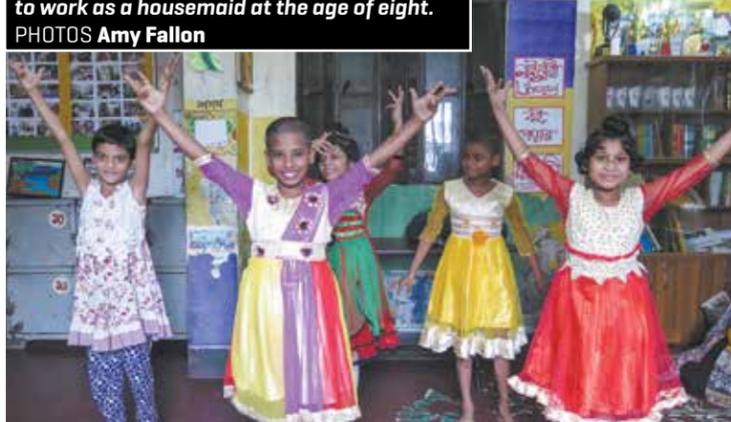
Mohammad was rescued by a worker from Aparajeyo, a charity that offers a home and education to more than 12,000 children.

No longer forced to work, Mohammad says part of him is "now happy".

"My situation is now better than my previous life," he says. But he is "still looking for my parents."



Above, Mohammad, on right, was separated from his mother at the train station in Dhaka. Below and above, Nilufar, in centre, was sent to work as a housemaid at the age of eight. PHOTOS Amy Fallon



WORKING AT EIGHT

Nilufar Aktar's desperate parents, a rickshaw driver and housewife from Rangpur district, about 300 kilometres from Dhaka, sent her out to work as a housemaid when she was just eight.

"I slept on the floor," says Nilufar.

She had to look after babies and wash clothes, but got only food and a roof over her head in return.

"I was very upset," she says. "I had a very awful job when friends were

going to school and having fun times."

Nilufar escaped one day when the door was left open and she was found crying by Aparajeyo.

Today she plays hide and seek, dances and goes to school, thanks to the charity which UNICEF pays for.

"I want to carry on with my studies and be a police officer so I can rescue girls like me from an awful life," she says.

All work and no play for millions of kids

BY Dhana Quinn

DID YOU KNOW that there are children your age who have to go to work? They can't go to school and decide what they want to do when they grow up. They must work and, sometimes, for very little or no money.

It's called child labour.

Felicity Wever works for UNICEF, an international group that looks after children.

"[Child labour is] the type of labour that deprives children of their childhood," she says.

An example might be a child being forced to work in a mine for many hours every day, which is very unhealthy. It also means the child is working like an adult when he or she should be at school.

CAN'T JUST BE KIDS

"About 11 per cent of children aged five to 17 are at work around the world," Ms Wever says. "This means around 168 million children."

A recent UNICEF report found the highest numbers of children working in ways that are bad for their health are in sub-Saharan Africa (countries south of the Sahara desert, including Ethiopia, Uganda and Burundi).

In the poorest countries in this part of Africa, nearly one in four children aged five to 14 are doing the kind of work that stops them from just being kids.

One of the main reasons children are forced to work is poverty. Many families do not have enough money to send their children to school. Instead they need them to help support the family.

LAWS PROTECT KIDS

In Australia there are laws to protect a child's right to an education and a safe life.

Each state and territory has slightly different rules. But if you want to work during school hours, you must be able to legally leave school. So if you want to work during school time in South Australia, for example, you must be at least 15.

Ms Wever says laws like that often don't exist in poorer countries.

"UNICEF works with governments to put in place laws and protections for children," she says.

But it also works with local groups, social workers and communities to help stamp out child labour.

She says families need help and advice if they are to change.

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

"Most countries around the world have signed on to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which means most countries want to protect children and let them get an education," Ms Wever says.

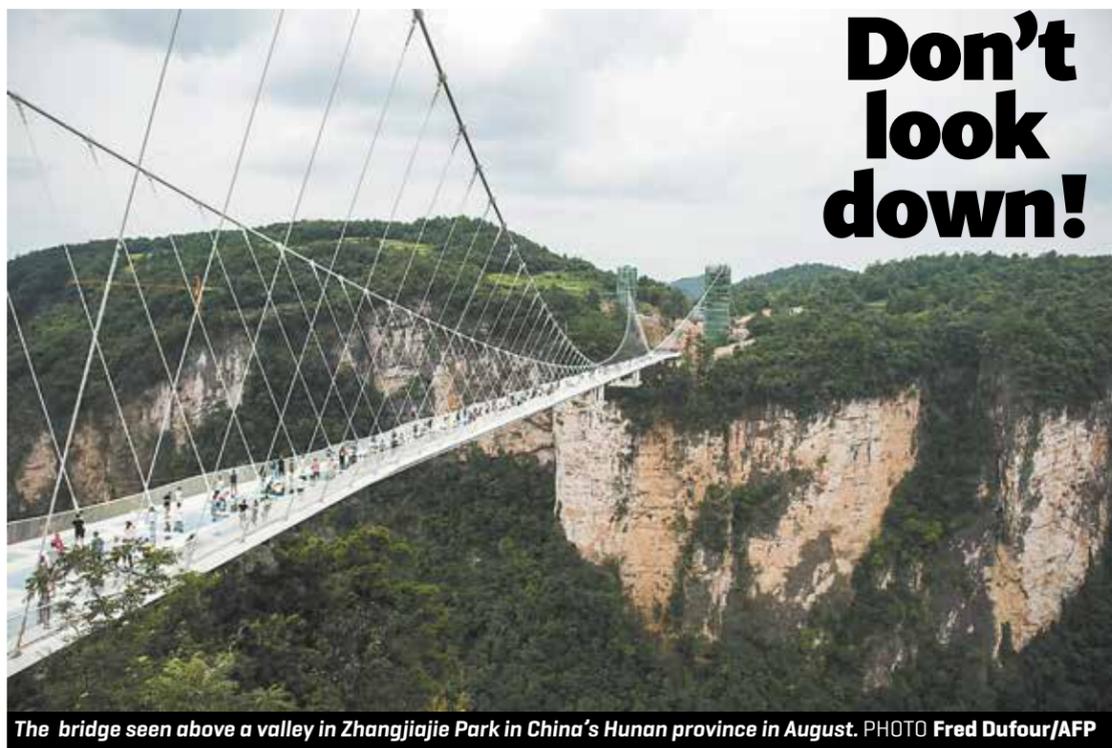
There are new international goals to end the worst forms of child labour by 2025. These include children being bought and sold and working for no money.

This is called slavery.

Ms Wever believes setting goals is important because it puts pressure on governments to really do something to help kids.

Youngest age a child is allowed to leave school in Australia

Australian Capital Territory	15
New South Wales	17
Northern Territory	15
South Australia	15
Tasmania	16
Queensland	15
Victoria	16
Western Australia	15



Don't look down!

The bridge seen above a valley in Zhangjiajie Park in China's Hunan province in August. PHOTO Fred Dufour/AFP

THE world's highest and longest glass-bottomed bridge has opened in China's spectacular Zhangjiajie mountains.

The bridge is 430 metres long and hangs 300 metres above the ground. It spans the canyon between two mountain cliffs in Zhangjiajie National Forest Park in China's central Hunan province.

Six metres wide and made of 99 panels of clear glass, the bridge can carry up to 800 people at the same time, an official in Zhangjiajie told

the Xinhua news agency.

Tourists can walk across the bridge, designed by Israeli architect Haim Dotan, and the more adventurous will be able to bungee jump or ride a zip line.

"I wanted to feel awe-inspired by this bridge. But I'm not afraid - it seems safe!" Wang Min, who was visiting the new structure with her husband and children, said.

NO PHOTOS

Cameras and selfie sticks were banned, and people wearing stilettos would not be allowed to walk on the bridge, Xinhua reported.

Agence France-Presse