

11 bonded labourers saved from shoe firm

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BENGALURU: Eleven bonded labourers trafficked from Bihar were rescued from a shoe sole manufacturing unit in Govindpura, KG Halli, east Bengaluru, on Thursday.

The labourers, aged between 16 and 43, were from Madhubani, Sitamarhi and Darbhanga districts in Bihar. Brought to Bengaluru by six different traffickers, they were made to toil at factories for three months to four years.

A supervisor was taken into custody from the factory, and a case was registered at the KG Halli Police Station on Thursday under Section 370, IPC (Trafficking of Persons) and the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976.

Two owners, who are brothers, and two traffickers including the lead trafficker, are yet to be arrested.

The labourers were working in the shoe factory for three to 10 months. They were promised Rs 6,000 as wages and they or their families were given advances ranging from Rs 500 to Rs 6,000 to bring them. Some of them received no wages at all, while a few were paid Rs 5,000 in the first month of work. A 21-year-old labourer, who has been working in Bengaluru for four years in different factories, said Rs 40,000 was sent to his family after two years, but this was the only wage he received for four years.

The worker said though he thought of running away, with Rs 100 they got every week, he knew he wouldn't be able to get far. "In four years, I was never allowed to visit my home in Bihar although I requested the supervisor and owner many times. I

thought of running away but others who had run away were brought back and beaten with iron rods, tortured with long needles and locked in a room for several days," he said.

The workers had to process 1,2 00 pairs of soles a day before going to bed. Some boys were cutting, shaping and pasting the PVC soles after a machine produced them, while others were dyeing them white or yellow and packing the soles. They were exposed to high-temperature hydraulic machines and fumes from chemicals and paints used for the soles.