

63 'confined' to Haryana brick kiln freed, 31 kids, pregnant woman among them

TNN | Feb 17, 2018, 07:16 AM IST

Mewat: A pregnant woman, 31 children and 31 labourers have been rescued from a brick kiln in Mewat, where they were allegedly forced to work without wages for three months under constant watch of goons hired by a contractor.

The labourers alleged the goons did not allow them to move out of the precinct where they stayed in shanties, next to the brick kiln, even for medical needs and threatened them harm if they tried to contact anyone. They lived in inhuman conditions, without drinking water or toilets, in the shanties set up near the brick kiln, around 75km from Gurgaon.

The district administration freed them from the clutches of the contractor on February 9 after a Delhi-based NGO got a whiff of the atrocities meted out to the labourers and their families and sounded an alarm.

A preliminary probe revealed contractors Ram Mohan and Rajkumar had lured workers to the Mewat brick kiln three months ago by promising them good wages. Sources said the labourers were mainly from Chitrakoot, Panhar and Banda districts of Uttar Pradesh, who had lost their income after brick kilns were shut down there to protect the Taj Mahal.

They were paid between Rs 5,000 and Rs 10,000 each as advance and were promised anything between Rs 25,000 and 50,000 as three months' wage on the basis of the number of bricks each one would make during his or her stay. Many of the labourers moved there with their families.

"Each of us made around 50,000 to 70,000 bricks in the past three months. But we were not paid for our work. Whenever we tried to speak to our manager at the kiln, Ram Mohan would interrupt and say payments would be made by June," Jamahir, one of the workers, told TOI on Friday. "We were also assaulted by Ram Mohan's men for demanding our wages. They wouldn't let us leave either," said another labourer Arjun.

Arjun said Ram Mohan and his goons later started harassing and abusing their wives and daughters too. “One of the women was pregnant but she was not allowed to go out even to see a doctor. Ram Mohan was worried that she would tell people about his misbehaviour with workers. So his goons always kept a watch on us,” said Rajmani, another worker.

On February 6, one of the labourers managed to contact members of the Delhi-based NGO, Bonded Labour Liberation Front. “The workers told us one of the two contractors (Ram Mohan) would pass lewd comments at the women and even made the children work. Basic facilities were missing,” said Swami Agnivesh, founder-president of the NGO.

The NGO informed the district administration and a team headed by subdivisional magistrate (Punhana) Jitender Garg, with the help of Mewat police, raided the brick kiln and rescued the workers. But the administration did not file a complaint against Ram Mohan or the owner of the brick kiln. “The workers didn’t file any complaint. We initiated action against the contractor and have taken an undertaking from him that if he ever misbehaves with workers again, a police complaint will be filed against him,” Garg told TOI.

The administration has also given letters to the labourers, stating that they are ‘free from any bond’, and sent them back home.