

Eight year-olds See South Africa Change through Jail Bars

While the world breathes a premature sigh of relief that apartheid in South Africa is dead, black children as young as eight are still being jailed in appalling conditions for trivial offences. Though not yet found guilty of any crime, they risk near starvation, rape — including the danger of AIDS — and other forms of violence at state hands These children, ignorant of court procedure, without legal advice and with no family members present, are regularly convicted as if they were adults.

Michelle Saffer writes from Cape Town

NEVILLE Snyman was 13 when he was arrested for theft. His mother could not leave work to go to court, but his aunt was there. The magistrates would not release the boy to the care of his aunt and he was held in the local jail. A month later cellmates murdered Neville.

Between 9,000-12,000 children between eight and 20 are being held on remand in South Africa awaiting trial, according to a report from the Community Law Centre (CLC) of the University of the Western Cape.

Since February 1990 and the unbanning of the African National Congress, there have been dramatic changes, including an amnesty for first-time offenders. One group's position has become worse since then, says the report — child offenders.

Poverty or an unhappy home life is usually the reason children end up in jail. Most of those arrested have left home and live on the streets.

"We see this as a creative response if conditions are difficult at home and their needs are not met," says Rosemary Shapiro of the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of Criminals (Nicro). "But they are treated as criminals — by no stretch of the imagination are they

seen anything. I just want to get out of here. I want to go home."

Shapiro said: "Children awaiting trial shouldn't be in jail at all. They are there because they have fallen through the net. And some of the people the children are locked up with are 'heavy'."

Seventeen-year-old Ryan has been in Pollsmoor for nine months waiting for his case to come to court. "I fear for my life," he said. "I know that in prison there are gangs that assault and sodomise and rob minors. I have seen and heard a lot of nasty things happening to small children. Anything can happen to me here."

And there is always the possibility that children may be infected with the AIDS virus from being sexually assaulted. Said Shapiro: "All the children we speak to say 'Please get us out of here.'"

Children are not protected when they are in jail. Even though prisons do try to keep children of different ages apart, there are many reports of rape and assault, said Michelle Morris, author of the Community Law Centre report. She added: "Buzzers and alarms within cells to warn warders are useless when a smaller child is overpowered and threatened with death."

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Growing up in Pain

Adequate nutrition, clean water, basic health care and primary education for all children would cost only about \$25 billion a year, says the 1993 State of the World's Children Report from UNICEF. This is less than what the US spends on cigarettes in six months. Yet most of the world's children still suffer appalling deprivation. In special reports from three continents, GEMINI NEWS SERVICE correspondents focus on prospects for future generations.



How Child Labour is Brushed under the Carpet

More than 150,000 children are bonded into work in the carpet industry in Uttar Pradesh state, India. They work in appalling conditions. The carpets they weave are exported mainly to the United States, Britain and Germany. To curb the use of children in the industry, an independent body is pushing for new restrictions and the use of labels that read "not made with child labour" for certified manufacturers. The following report examines the Indian carpet industry at a time when reforms are planned.

A J Singh writes from Mirzapur, India

MOVES are underway in India to attach labels to hand-woven carpets reading "not made with child labour" and so help end bonded child labour. Labels and guidelines are expected in March.

"If the move succeeds it will be the final celebration of a gigantic fraud," says supporter Saibal DasGupta. "Customers, both Indian and foreign, need not worry about pangs of conscience any longer."

Many carpets exported to Western nations are a product of child servitude which is rampant in India, even though it is banned under the Child Labour Act passed six years ago. The Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF) in New Delhi says 70,000 looms in Uttar Pradesh state alone employ 150,000 children. Ninety per cent are bonded.

The heartland of India's carpet-making industry is nicknamed Dollar Land. It includes the districts of Mirzapur, Badohi, Kumariya, Gopiganj and Sombdha and earns \$140 million a year for carpet exports mainly to the United States, Germany and Britain.

Loom owners make lucrative profits, saving on their wage bill by using bonded children. They scout for child labour in the poverty-stricken states of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh and in neighbouring Nepal.

On the pretext of training boys, they promise illiterate parents monthly wages of \$7-\$10 per child. DasGupta says: "The industry hardly pays any wages besides the 'loans' advanced to the parents of the children." Children are also put into bondage when poor



Photo: UNICEF

Golden Future Vanishes for Brazil's Street Kids

Brazil's economic crisis has produced seven million street children with little prospect for the future. Violent mass-robberies by teen gangs have erupted in recent months, demonstrating the sense of futility among this lost generation. However, one bright spot has arisen. An international delegation of street children organised a one-day protest in Brazil's capital to call government attention to their plight.

Rosangela Trolles writes from Rio de Janeiro

BRAZILIAN politicians bravely proclaimed throughout the 1970s that theirs was the "country of the future," projecting slow but steady economic growth. With a predominantly youthful population, the country would find prosperity in the maturing of its future professionals.

But after 11 years of economic crisis, including a record inflation rate of 1,800 per cent in 1990 caused by heavy national debt, the future appears bleak, especially among the young who constitute more than one-third of the population.

Today, grave social problems plague the country as a whole. The gradual bankruptcy of institutions is a reality. The rise of economic misery has spilled over to family life, producing a new generation of street children estimated to number seven million, or five per cent of the country's population of 150 million. Some 500,000 street children work as prostitutes.

For these people, society offers no prospect for the future. Juvenile delinquency, which seemed a minor problem to be coped with, has reached alarming levels. In recent months, Brazilians have seen their displaced youth explode in a prison break and several violent mass robberies, known locally as arrastoes.

Arrastoes have become increasingly popular in the past two years. Typically, the spree evolves from a harmless dance competition at a beach. As rival youth gangs converge, fights break out. In the midst of the escalating violence, bathers flee the beaches, leaving their belongings to be taken by the

gangs.

The popular Ipanema and Copacabana beaches were hit by arrastoes in October in the midst of a heat wave that attracted large numbers to the beaches. A gang fight at Ipanema resulted in three arrastoes, in which four beachgoers were wounded and 48 people arrested.

"I say a 20-year old man being attacked by a group," said the chief of the lifeguard post at Ipanema. "Soon after, a 13-year-old boy asked for help at the post. His face was bloody and his teeth were broken."

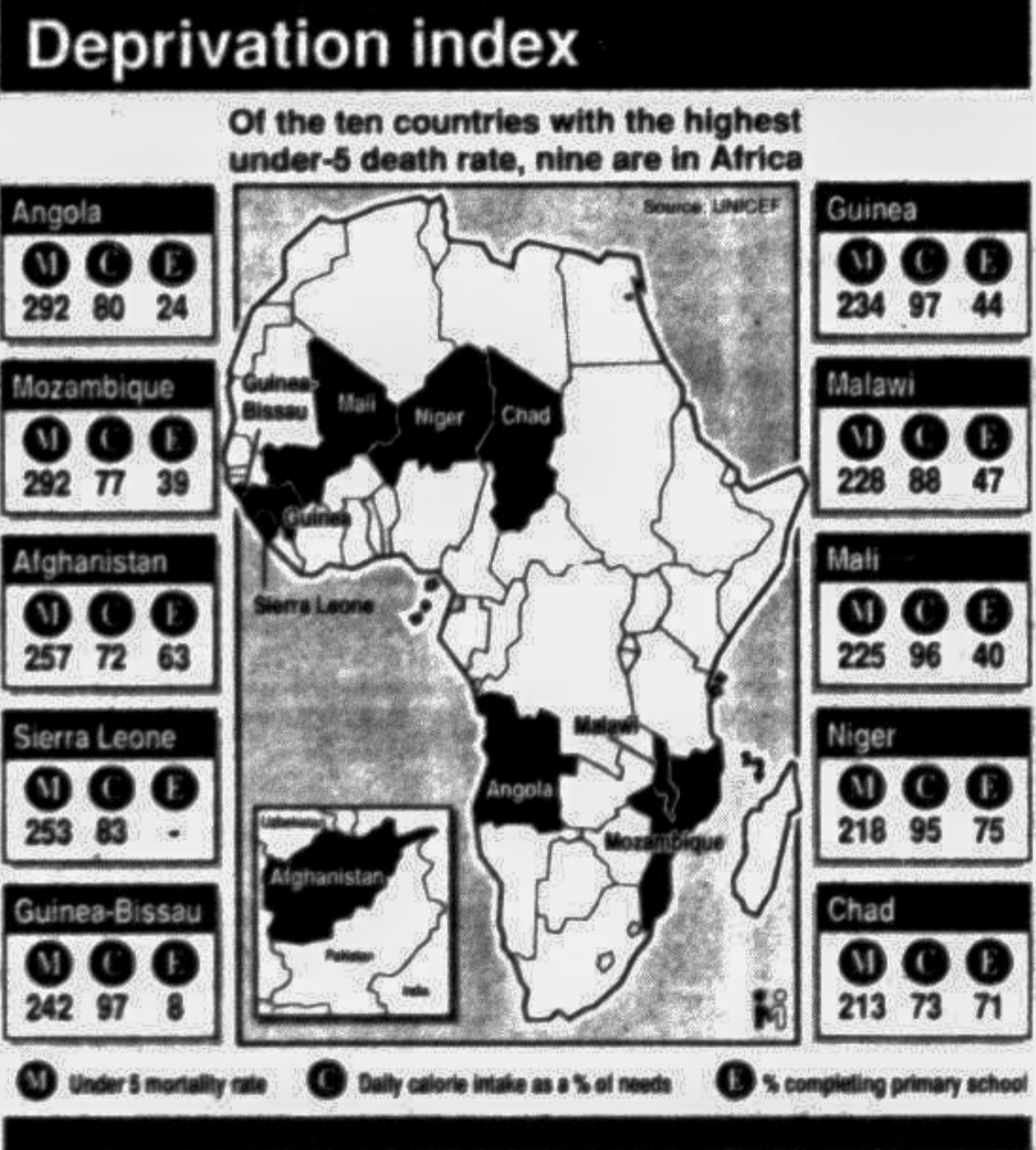
The fight spread later to Copacabana, becoming more serious as the day progressed. Police and local drug traffickers, both concerned about the resulting economic instability, intervened to prevent the recurrence of arrastoes in Rio, but they could not stop the growth of this new robbery technique.

Wide media reporting of the disturbances helped spread the word of such an effective robbery method among youth, resulting in similar outbreaks in Fortaleza, capital of the state of Ceara, Londrina, in Parana state, across the interior of Sao Paulo state and even in the midst of a popular religious festival in Belem, capital of Para state.

An even more alarming rebellion blew up only four days later at Sao Paulo's state Foundation for the Welfare of the Under-aged, a cramped prison housing 1,200 male and female youths aged between 15 and 18, roughly five times its intended capacity. Inmates were routinely subject to physical abuse, shortages of mat-



A BRAZILIAN BOY Hope and despair



criminals."

Most children arrested are charged with petty crimes like shoplifting, possessing dagga (marijuana), drunkenness and loitering.

In the tourist haven of Cape Town, street children are a visible feature. During the peak tourist season in particular, police are often asked by residents to "clean up the streets" by arresting homeless children. Although the police have charge them within 48 hours, most find themselves in prison waiting for their case to come to court.

If parents are located, children may be released in their care. Too often police make no effort to find the parents, the CLC report claims. Even if they do, many parents cannot take time off work to go to court.

Nor are there enough "places of safety" for these children. The result is jail. There is no legislated time limit on how long prisoners can stay on remand.

Jaco, 15, is in Pollsmoor jail in Cape Town, where Nelson Mandela was once held. "I've been here five months awaiting trial," he said. "I was afraid when I first came to prison. Prison is a very dangerous place for young people to be kept. When something happens here, you are not allowed to talk, because you haven't

THE day's fishing had been good. Kushi Chakma, a fisherman from Chokoria felt pleased with himself. Despite the early warning of a cyclonic storm rising in the Bay of Bengal, Kushi had come to the sea. Looking at the basket of fishes, he was thinking of how frequent storms were in this part of the year. But that didn't worry him. Kushi dragged his boat to the shore. Taking it far into the sand he took extra care to tie it firmly. If the wind caught it, he would have to buy a new one. Since fishes were abundant, he was already planning to return next morning again.

The basket on his head, Kushi was soon on his way. He would walk the long way back home. People of these coastal areas of Bangladesh were strong and sturdy like himself and very much used to hard life. The face of his newly wed, lovely Mathin flashed before his eyes. His loving wife would be anxiously waiting for him. Kushi noted with a little uneasiness that there were only few fishermen today. He felt a little uneasy. What had kept them? They had been talking about the coming storm. Was it really so dangerous?

With alarm Kushi noted that the wind was fast increasing. Even the roar of the sea seemed much louder. Normally from so far inside the land, only a faint hushing sound of the sea could be heard. But today it was different. The rising wind carried a siren with the roaring of the sea.

Every minute the wind seemed to be stronger. Fear gripped Kushi's heart as he became aware of the fast rising storm. Looking up at the sky he saw the angry dark clouds fast gathering on the darkening world around him. It seemed as though night was falling too soon. The force of the wind carried the clouds in a mad race. Streaks of lightning flashed across the blackened sky. Kushi quickened his pace. He must reach home before the storm broke in fully fury. But it seemed too late.

One bizarre lightning flashed, blinding him momentarily. It was followed by a loud crash of thunder. Then thunder were crashing one after another, vibrating across the sky in a hell like fury. Swirling rain poured over the blowing dust and sand. The driving force of the rain was sharp against his sodden body. Kushi could hardly walk through the

A Remembrance The Furious Night

by Tulip Chowdhuri

raging winds. His teeth gritting, Kushi was holding fast to the basket which the tremendous gust of wind was trying to pull out of his clutching hands. He dug his toes into the mud with each step. That kept him from falling down. He struggled on. Perhaps his love for life was working behind his fighting will. He longed more than ever to be home, to hold his beloved Mathin close to his chest. Perhaps he should retreated earlier to some after place? But what could he do now except pray to the Almighty?

The storm was then raging furiously. The darkness of night was illuminated by a reddish scowl of the stormy sky. The basket was whisked out like a small toy out of Kushi's hands. The roaring of the raging sea, the shrill hissing of the maddening storm, together produced a weird groaning sound. Every gust of wind flew Kushi some paces

away. Kushi lost control of his movement. He was being dragged and battered by the raging wind.

What was that? Somebody wailing? Not one, but thousand cries with the howling wind came to Kushi's ears. Cries from men rose one upon another to be stifled to deathly silence. Cries of death raged from dying animals above those of men. Kushi caught glimpses of crashing houses and trees. The storm was thrashing them into bits and carrying them away in swirls of debris. Suddenly Kushi felt himself being scooped up in the hands of death as a devilish gust of wind picked him high above the ground. He closed his eyes.

When he opened his eyes, Kushi found himself stuck against a large uprooted tree. The storm had dumped him within its tangled branches. There seemed to be a lot of water beneath. What was that

cold thing touching his feet? His hands recede down. The body of a dead baby? Only a moment he held it. The force of the wind whisked it out of his hand. The water was rising beneath him. Oh Lord, the sea has risen so high? The cold hands of death touched Kushi's heart. The rising scream in his throat fell silent. Kushi saw no more of furious night which witnessed the terrible angry nature shatter and plunder across the land.

What had happened? Was it a nightmare? Wasn't he dead but had been only unconscious? Kushi's breaths came through long suffocating efforts. His eyelids were heavy with salt and soil. Thirst gripped his bursting throat. He was still stuck to the tree he remembered hazily. With pain he could remember of the terrible nature he had seen before losing senses.

How long had the storm been? The tattered world before him spoke of the cruel game that nature had played on that cruel night of the 29th April, 1991. The sad bits and pieces of the horrible storm remained only. The thrown about bodies, carcasses entangled with the broken uprooted trees, remains of what were homes — stood as battered

witnesses to unimaginable tragedy of mankind. The cruel cyclone had left tales of destruction and death; a horrible catastrophe.

Kushi dragged himself out of his miraculous shelter. There, a little far away, was the body of a woman. Could it be his beloved wife? The face was hidden with dirt. His fingers moved over the mud, clearing the features as he turned the dead face towards him. No, this wasn't Mathin. Oh, there was another body, and another. So many dead bodies lay scattered about the ravaged ground. Kushi stared hopelessly at the unknown, still faces. He let his eyes stretch as far as he could. Was Mathin lying among these deeds or was he the cursed survivor?

Kushi Chakma sauntered over the dead bodies. The unknown faces were white as sheets, some already swollen. One upon another lay the victims of the cyclone. Kushi ran to and fro, scuttling over the silent thousands. Perhaps the next body would be of his beloved Mathin's?

Every year, with April's arrival, I feel the remembrance of Kushi Chakma and the thousands dead torture my soul till I write about them.

tresses, restrooms and medical assistance. The last straw that caused the rebellion was the thrashing of a teenager by a prison official.

Minors, armed with knives, pieces of wood, iron bars and even electric saws rose up, setting fire to the prison administration building in a 25-hour rampage. Many of the teens were intoxicated from alcohol or nail polish.

In a frenzied 90-minute period, an estimated 200 youths tore apart three buildings and 20 vehicles. Local military police, fearful of repeating a massacre in which 111 were killed in a similar uprising at the state's largest adult prison only weeks earlier, refused to enter the youth facility without written permission from authorities.

An estimated 6000 teens escaped the prison, later re-assembling in the centre of Sao Paulo, from which they launched an aggressive campaign of arrastoes.

Alarmed, Brazilians are now looking for ways to put an end to the youth crime. And there is no holding back. A group of 20 vigilantes armed with machine-guns and shotguns has already tried to break into a detention centre with the intention of terminating the problem. Another group of etc.

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