

PROJECT SYNDICATE

From child slavery to freedom



KAILASH SATYARTHI

IT is a blot on the face of humanity that we have yet to eradicate slavery – of children, no less. Not only does child slavery persist; the number of child slaves, 5.5 million, has remained constant in the last two decades. They are bought and sold like animals, sometimes for less than a pack of cigarettes. Add to their number the 168 million child labourers, 59 million out-of-school children, and 15 million girls under 15 who are forced to marry every year, and the situation is beyond unacceptable.

Eighteen years ago, the Global March Against Child Labour spearheaded a global movement to bring child labour and child slavery to the attention of global leaders. Thanks to the invaluable contribution of fellow activists, workers, educators, and businesses, the campaign was a resounding success, leading to the adoption of the International Labor Organization's Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention.

Clearly, however, there is much work left to do. That is why the Global March Against Child Labour worked so hard – collecting 550,000 signatures on a petition – to push world leaders to include strong language against child slavery in the Sustainable Development Goals, which will guide global development efforts for the next 15 years. Among

the SDG targets is one that aims to "eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour."

But now it is time to back that promise – one of 169 targets – with concerted action. After all, if child labour, slavery, human trafficking, and violence against children continue, we will have failed to accomplish the agenda's overarching goal of achieving inclusive and sustainable prosperity. And the responsibility does not lie only with governments; businesses, civil society, and individual citizens must all contribute, not least by pressuring their leaders to make a change.

Consider the situation in India, where impending revisions to two major development policies – the National Education Policy and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act – are heading in opposite directions. On the one hand, a new education policy has the potential to address child labour as a barrier to education and, more broadly, to improve the life prospects of millions of marginalised and deprived children. On the other hand, the proposed amendments to the Child Labour Act would erect new barriers to further progress on education.

Specifically, the changes to the Child Labour Act would allow children under the age of 14 to help their families in "non-hazardous" family enterprises or the entertainment industry. This may sound innocuous, but it fails to acknowledge a stark and



PHOTO: STAR

undisputable reality: Work for "family enterprises" can be as brutal as any other kind. And the list of

"hazardous" occupations is far from complete. Before being rescued by my

organisation, Bachpan Bachao Andolan, eight-year-old Arpita was forced to work 16-18 hour days in the home of her uncle as domestic "help." When we rescued her, we had to break down the door. It was the dead of winter, and she was barely clothed and severely malnourished, covered in wounds, and cowering under a rag on her uncle's balcony.

Likewise, when we rescued ten-year-old Mohsin and eight-year-old Aslam in 2007 from a sweatshop – owned by their uncle – where they made children's clothing for one of world's largest garment retailers, they were starving. The jobs performed by Arpita, Mohsin, and Aslam would not be considered "hazardous" under the amended act.

In a recent analysis, we found that one-fifth of the children under age 14 rescued by Bachpan Bachao Andolan were working in family enterprises. More than 40 percent of the rescued children were performing hazardous jobs – for example, working in roadside restaurants (dhabas) or manufacturing garments, leather goods, cosmetics, or electronics – that would be allowed under the amended act.

There are millions of enslaved Arpitas, Mohsins, and Aslams. But if the proposed amendments are adopted, we will not be able to rescue a single child under 14 years of age who is employed by his or her "family" – no matter how vile the conditions of their servitude. The impact – not just on individual children, but also on the future of our society – will be devastating. On behalf of India's children, we

call upon our parliament to do the right thing and reject the proposed amendments to the Child Labour Act.

Beyond India, the imperative to protect children is just as strong. If we are to realise the future promised in the SDGs, surely we must do everything in our power to protect the fundamental human rights of every person, especially the most vulnerable. That is why governments worldwide must deepen their commitment to pursuing child-friendly policies and investing in the protection and education of their young people.

My colleagues and I have humbly done our part over the years, rescuing more than 84,000 children from despicable conditions. It has not been enough to end the blight of child slavery, but to those children and their families, it has meant everything.

Still, far too many children remain enslaved, missing out not just on their childhood, but also on the chance for a happy, healthy, and prosperous future. It is time for the world to stand up and lend its voice to those whose cannot. We must demand that our leaders fulfill their promise of ensuring that every child's life is free from exploitation, enriched by education, and full of promise. Our generation can and should be the one that ends child slavery forever.

The writer, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, is Honorary President of the Global March Against Child Labour and the founder of Bachpan Bachao Andolan. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2016. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

Demographics as Destiny The Republican Conundrum

ASHFAQUE SWAPAN

AMERICA is changing. It is becoming more diverse, more socially tolerant. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, whites will cease to be a majority by 2041. Aggrieved working-class whites are alarmed. Their economic condition is perilous. Their cosy comfortable worldview, inherited from their parents and grandparents, is under assault. The overwhelming national consensus of the U.S. as a predominantly Christian, patriarchal, and yes, white society, is gone.

As minorities have been embraced by the Democratic Party, this group has flocked to the Republican Party.

A massive shift in US politics began in 1964, after US President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the historic Civil Rights Act to make racist laws illegal. In 1965, he signed the Voting Rights Act that strengthened African-American voting rights.

This triggered a backlash in the Southern states, which were once part of a confederacy that had defended slavery. Whites began to abandon the Democratic Party and move to the Republican Party en masse.

At the time the Civil Rights Act was signed into law, both Democratic and Republican parties were more diverse within each party. This created an atmosphere of compromise and deal-making in the US Congress that smoothed the legislative process.

In today's polarised politics, it's hard to believe that a Republican president, Richard Nixon, created the Environmental Protection Agency, conservative icon President Ronald Reagan signed a law granting amnesty to millions of undocumented immigrants, and Democratic President Bill Clinton signed welfare reform into law.

Hot button issues like abortion, school

prayer, immigration, LGBTrights and gun control polarised both parties: College-educated liberal whites, single women and ethnic minorities have gone to the Democratic Party, while business interests, religious conservatives, conservative educated whites and in particular non-college educated whites are Republican.

While this has resulted in a virtual lock for the Republicans in one of the chambers of the US Congress –the House – growing polarisation, along with demographic changes, also provide Democrats a widening edge in presidential elections. In the last six presidential elections, Democrats have won the popular vote five times. In the preceding two decades, Republicans won five out of six presidential races.

"In 1980, Ronald Reagan won 56 percent of all white voters and won election in a 44-state landslide. In 2012... (Republican) nominee Mitt Romney carried 59 percent of all white voters yet lost decisively," writes David Wasserman, an analyst with the Cook Political Report. "African-Americans, Latinos, Asians and other non-whites – all overwhelmingly Democratic-leaning groups – rose from 12 percent of voters in 1980 to 28 percent in 2012."

"Republicans have sharply increased their share of the white vote, but this advantage is being undermined by other demographic changes.

In 2008 and 2012 elections, Republicans performed best with white voters without college degrees. They carried that group by 14 percentage points in 2008 and a whopping 26 points in 2012.

However, the share of these older, rural voters in the pool of voters decline 3 percentage points every four years.

"Democrats' coalition of non-white, young and well-educated voters continues to expand every election, while Republicans' coalition of

white, older and less-educated voters keeps shrinking," writes Wasserman.

Republican Party elders recognise the looming threat. Following the defeat of Republican Mitt Romney to President Barack Obama in 2012, the Republican National Committee set up an independent review panel – the Growth and Opportunity Project.

The panel made a sobering observation: "Public perception of the Party is at record low. Young voters are increasingly rolling

The Republican dominance in the House has been fuelled by the spectacular rise of conservative media which directly helped the rise of the Tea Party movement, a grassroots, non-college white protest against President Barack Obama's healthcare programme.

their eyes at what the Party represents, and many minorities wrongly think that Republicans do not like them or want them in the country."

The panel conducted focus groups in Columbus, Ohio, and Des Moines, Iowa, to listen to voters who recently left the party. "Asked to describe Republicans, they said that the Party is 'scary,' 'narrow minded,' and 'out of touch' and that we were a Party of 'stuffy old men,'" the RNC report said.

The report warned: "The nation's

demographic changes add to the urgency of recognising how precarious our position has become."

Its wise recommendation: "Among the steps Republicans take in the Hispanic community and beyond we must embrace and champion comprehensive immigration reform. If we do not, our Party's appeal will continue to shrink to its core."

Yet immigration reform is taboo in the current Republican campaign. As for wooing ethnic minorities, after Donald Trump's

represented everywhere else," political scientist Gary C. Jacobson, an expert on congressional politics, told political analyst Ronald Brownstein.

Every 10 years, when voting districts are revised, Republicans enhance their advantage in states they control through a re-zoning tactic called gerrymandering. For instance, voters in a district with a huge Democratic advantage can be dispersed into adjacent districts with an overwhelming Republican advantage.

It is their advantage with whites, though, that ensures Republican control of the house. "Whites exceed their share of the national population in 263 House districts fully three-fifths of the total number of seats," Brownstein reports. "And Republicans now hold a crushing 199 of those 263 white-leaning seats, putting them on the brink of a House majority before they even begin competing for more diverse seats."

The Republican dominance in the House has been fuelled by the spectacular rise of conservative media which directly helped the rise of the Tea Party movement, a grassroots, non-college white protest against President Barack Obama's healthcare programme, and helped Republicans take control of the House in 2010.

"The challenge of spreading and germinating the Tea Party idea was surmounted with impressive ease because a major sector of the U.S. media today is openly partisan – including Fox News Channel, the right-wing 'blogosphere,' and a nationwide network of right-wing talk radio programmes," Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson write in their 2012 book, The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism.

The writer is an Atlanta (US) based freelance journalist.

QUOTABLE Quote

BESSIE COLEMAN
(January 26, 1892 – April 30, 1926)
First female pilot of African American descent and first Native American woman to hold a license

The air is the only place free from prejudice.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Potter's stuff
5 Long-legged bird
10 Less common
12 "House-boat" star
13 In harmony
14 Yucca's kin
15 Belief, in brief
16 Fan
18 Chin cover
20 Suffering
21 Stately trees
23 Hosp. parts
24 Sailing vessel
26 Theater award
28 --up (dress)
29 Ride the waves
31 Before today
32 Sofa's cousin
36 Aquatic mammal
39 Simple card game
40 Hirsch of "Milk"
41 Hackneyed
43 Barber's tool
44 Boom variety
45 Pricey

46 Special talent

DOWN
1 "Spectre" star
2 Ranch rope
3 Kitchen come-on
4 Hankering
5 European native
6 Fast food request
7 Speech
8 Partying
9 Prepares to propose
11 Gives out new hands
17 Mouse alert
19 Road rescue
22 City routes
24 Spot for a workout
25 Worry
27 Many a time
28 Circus stars
30 Apply
33 Baling need
34 Dine at home
35 Put up
37 Lotion additive
38 Maryland player
42 Hold up

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

TURN OFF THAT TV!
THE SHOW ISN'T OVER
GREAT! NOT WALKER!
IT'S OVER WHEN I SAY IT'S OVER!
THEN SAY "IT'S JUST STARTING," I MISSED THE BEGINNING

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

B	A	B	B	L	E	A	S	K	S
E	Y	E	L	I	D	C	H	A	I
N	E	G	A	T	E	T	O	Y	S
H	O	S	T	I	N	E	P	T	
A	R	H	O	G	A	Z	E	L	L
M	E	R	M	A	I	D	N	I	P
S	A	T	E	D	W	E	N	T	
L	A	S	S	I	E				
A	M	I	D	A	D	A	P	T	S
R	E	N	O	P	E	R	S	I	A
K	N	E	W	S	A	Y	I	N	G

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

HAMMIE, DID YOU JUST USE THE BATHROOM?
YEAH.
DID YOU WASH YOUR HANDS?
THAT'S FUNNY, BECAUSE I DIDN'T HEAR ANY WATER RUNNING.
UH, SURE.
OH.
I GUESS YOU LEARNED A LESSON.
YEAH. ALWAYS RUN THE WATER BEFORE LEAVING THE BATHROOM.