

At 5, Rina already has back-breaking job by Terry Friel



This September 2, 2004 picture shows 5-year-old Rina breaking stones near Siliguri India.

Monday September 6, 10:16 AM (“Labor Day” story from Siliguri, India (Reuters) – where is Siliguri? (see map below)

Stone chips fly as Rina, her face frowning in concentration, expertly crushes a rock to rubble in just a few seconds on the banks of a swift brown river in eastern India. With the skills of a professional, she deftly uses her hands and feet to reposition the pieces, dodging the fast, heavy strokes of her own hammer.

Rina is five. She has already been a professional rock breaker for a year, slaving six days a week in the sapping heat and humidity of West Bengal. “I like it,” she whispers shyly, without slowing her hectic pace or looking up, wearing the same grubby and torn brown skirt and lime green top she wears almost every day. “But I would like to be in school.” All around her, squatting on the same metre-high piles of stones under black umbrellas to shield them from the sun, scores of children pound rocks the size of cricket balls into small stones to help their families eat. India's constitution bans children younger than 14 from working. But human rights groups estimate up to 115 million children -- roughly twice the entire population of the United Kingdom -- work for a living. Millions more work part-time to help their families. “The situation in India is alarming. The gap between the haves and the have-nots is widening,” says Chanchal Sinha, deputy manager of Delhi-based Child Relief & You (CRY) aid group.

In poverty-stricken India, children are routinely pressed into service to help support families, doing everything from working in quarries, mines and factories to helping on the family farm, and mostly in unsafe conditions. Most are hidden away in sweatshops and factories.

But here in India's "chicken neck" -- the narrow strip of land between Nepal and Bangladesh that links the isolated northeastern states with the rest of the country -- it is easier to find children working the river beds than it is to find adults. Some, like Rina, break rocks into small stones, known as bozri, to be used for buildings or roads. Others wade through strong currents, sometimes crossing neck-deep channels and occasionally being swept downstream -- to gather sand. "If I am not working, how can I earn money to live?" asks 10-year-old Mina Kumari, bashing rocks with her brother, Rajesh, who thinks he is six but looks older -- no one here really knows when they were born.

Mina and Rajesh, too, say they like working to support their family -- like most in the Prakash Nagar slum on the banks of the Mahananda River, they are migrant workers from the lawless and impoverished neighbouring state of Bihar. They have never been to school, but dream of going one day.

"We are poor - I have to work," Rajesh says, wearing only tattered black shorts, his face smudged white from the grit of the broken rocks. "We are trying to earn enough to live. But I want to study. I want to be a proper man." The stone-breakers are paid by the truckload 700 rupees for a five-tonne load -- which takes Rina and her parents three to four weeks to fill.

It's not enough. Rina, her year-old-old sister Priyanka and three-year-old brother Vikram, live in a bamboo hut and eat only rice or homemade bread for dinner.

On pay days, there's meat if they are lucky. Most days, there aren't even vegetables.

"We are poor -- how can we afford vegetables?" asks Rina's mother, Leela, a sad-eyed 25-year-old in a bright red sari. When Vikram and Priyanka get older, they, too, will have to work, smashing heavy hammers against the rocks. Vikram is already practising with the only toy he has -- a hammer.

Leela's face darkens as she thinks about the future and sees no way out. "We are poor. We all have to work," she explains, as she crouches and shifts another load of rocks to Rina's reach. "My daughter has to work. I am sad. She just wants to go to school."

(Additional reporting by Meenakshi Ray) *Where is Siliguri India?*



REUTERS  Sun Sep 5, 11:48 AM ET

Five-year-old Rina (R) who breaks stones with her family rests in Siliguri in this picture taken September 2, 2004. Rina has been a professional rock breaker for a year, slaving six days a week in the sapping heat and humidity of West Bengal. India's constitution bans children younger than 14 from working, but human rights groups estimate up to 115 million children -- roughly twice the entire population of the United Kingdom -- work for a living. To Accompany Feature India Child Reuters/Kamal Kishore



Thu Sep 2, 7:23 AM ET

REUTERS 


Rina Kumari Sahani, 5, an Indian slum girl, breaks stones next to her siblings on the banks of the Mahananda river in the northeastern Indian city of Siliguri, September 2, 2004. The family earns 700 rupees (\$15.10) between them every three to four weeks for a truckload of stones. Over 400 million people in India live below the internationally agreed poverty line (living on less than \$1 per day). According to estimates, several hundred thousand children work as laborers and beg on the streets in India. REUTERS/Kamal Kishore



REUTERS  Sun Sep 5, 11:49 AM ET

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Sun Sep 5, 11:49 AM **REUTERS**  ET

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Sun Sep 5, 11:52 AM
ET

REUTERS 

Five-year-old Rina breaks stones next to her siblings in Siliguri in this picture taken September 2, 2004. Rina has been a professional rock breaker for a year, slaving six days a week in the sapping heat and humidity of West Bengal. India's constitution bans children younger than 14 from working, but human rights groups estimate up to 115 million children -- roughly twice the entire population of the United Kingdom -- work for a living. TO ACCOMPANY FEATURE INDIA CHILD REUTERS/Kamal Kishore



REUTERS  Sun Sep 5, 11:50 AM ET

Five-year-old Rina (R) who breaks stones with her family rests in Siliguri in this picture taken September 2, 2004. Rina has been a professional rock breaker for a year, slaving six days a week in the sapping heat and humidity of West Bengal. India's constitution bans children younger than 14 from working, but human rights groups estimate up to 115 million children -- roughly twice the entire population of the United Kingdom -- work for a living. **To Accompany Feature India Child Reuters/Kamal Kishore**



Sun Sep 5, 11:24 AM ET

REUTERS 

Five-year-old Rina is cared for by her mother in Siliguri in this picture taken September 2, 2004. Rina has been a professional rock breaker for a year and works with her family, slaving six days a week in the sapping heat and humidity of West Bengal. India's constitution bans children younger than 14 from working, but human rights groups estimate up to 115 million children -- roughly twice the entire population of the United Kingdom -- work for a living. **To Accompany Feature India Child Reuters/Kamal Kishore**



Sun Sep 5, 11:22 AM
ET

REUTERS 

Five-year-old Rina waits for food in her hut in Siliguri in this picture taken September 2, 2004. Rina has been a professional rock breaker for a year and works with her family, slaving six days a week in the sapping heat and humidity of West Bengal. India's constitution bans children younger than 14 from working, but ^{rot} human rights groups estimate up to 115 million children -- roughly twice the entire population of the United Kingdom -- work for a living. Accompany Feature India Child REUTERS/Kamal Kishore



Thu Sep 2, 8:15 AM ET

REUTERS 

Rina Kumari Sahani, 5, an Indian slum girl, breaks stones next to her siblings on the banks of the river Mahananda in the north-eastern Indian city of Siliguri, September 2, 2004. The family earns 700 rupees (\$15.10) between them every three to four weeks for a truckload. Over 400 million people in India live below the internationally agreed poverty line (living on less than \$1 per day). According to estimates, several hundred thousand children work as laborers and beg on the streets in India. REUTERS/Kamal Kishore

Note the reference to Sweatshops (note: see question below)**

1. Focusing on the highlighted sentences that start with “Sweatshop” above which sentence generally true and which is generally false (at least according to all survey research on child labor by UNICEF and the ILO). Where are child workers such as Rina much more likely to “hidden away” in dangerous jobs? Rina likes her job, but would rather be in school. Like Muni in the World Bank film, Leela is a migrant worker. Why are they especially vulnerable to malnutrition and poverty? Why would Rina be much more likely to be in school if her mother Leela had a factory job? Even without ILO and UNICEF studies, why is it very unlikely one would find many five year old Indian girls working in “factories and sweatshops?” What policies widely used in Mexico, Brazil, Bangladesh and Indonesia might be used to help children like Rina? Contrast these policies with an enforced legal ban on child labor or the solution touted at the end of the Tom Friedman special on Outsourcing in India. Why the “digital divide” scenes in both the World Bank and Discovery channel films encouraging but not very realistic?