

Children's rights groups don't like changes in India's child-labor laws

By Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.25.15

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Indian child laborers carry sacks of vegetable leftovers collected from a wholesale market to be sold in their shantytown on the outskirts of Jammu, India, on the World Day against Child Labor, June 12, 2015. AP Photo/Channi Anand

SURAT, India — The small hands of the young workers move quickly. They only pause to wipe sweat from their foreheads. They are making cardboard boxes, which stack up in huge towers.

Many of these workers are children. They are not even teenagers yet. In Surat, a city in western India, there are more than 50,000 child workers, human rights groups say. Many of these children work in factories making clothes.

India has laws saying children must stay in school until age 14. Still, millions of children work across India.

Working For Family Businesses

The Indian government has come up with changes to the laws for working children. The changes would allow some children under age 14 to work. The children would be able to work if the company is owned by a family member.

Groups who fight for children's rights dislike the rule changes. They say the changes could cause more children to work. Kids who work often drop out of school. They may have to work long hours for very little money.

The new rules are trying to find a balance, India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, said. Children do need an education, but India is a poor country. Some families need their children to work.

In many poor Indian families, boys and girls help their parents from a young age. Making all child labor illegal could hurt small farmers, shopkeepers and others.

Numbers from the Indian government show that fewer children are working. In 2001, there were 12.6 million child workers in India. In 2011, there were 4.3 million. Still, these numbers may not count many children who work for family businesses.

"I'm His Uncle" Or "He's My Son"

There are groups in India that fight for children's rights. These groups do not like the new rules. They say the rules can help companies get around the law. By calling them "family," bosses can hire children younger than 14.

In Surat, bosses often tell the government that the children working there are their family members. The young workers keep quiet, and the government rarely finds out the truth.

"Family business sounds good," said Chandrashekhar Deshmukh. He works for a children's rights group in Surat. Still, he said, bosses will say, "I'm his uncle" or "he's my son."

The new rules might actually increase the number of child workers, Deshmukh said.

With the changes, bosses who hire child workers could have worse punishments. They could be fined \$800 or sent to prison for two years. Parents who break the rules once will not be punished. The government knows poor parents need their children to work.

Will Law Hurt Indian Companies?

In Surat, children who make clothing do not make much money. Many of them only make \$1.50 a day.

Some people still do not like the changes. India has been trying to expand its businesses. There is the feeling that if children cannot work, it will hurt Indian companies, said Prabhat Kumar. He works for a charity that helps child workers.

Still, Kumar said this will not happen. No one wants to buy things that are made by children, he said.

Quiz

- 1 According to the section "Working For Family Businesses," which of the following details helps explain why groups fighting for children's rights dislike changes to the working laws?
- (A) Kids who work often drop out of school.
 - (B) Children do need an education, but India is a poor country.
 - (C) Making all child labor illegal could hurt small farmers, shopkeepers and others.
 - (D) The new rules are trying to find a balance, India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, said.

- 2 Which detail from the article BEST helps the reader understand why some parents are not against children working?
- (A) India has laws saying children must stay in school until age 14. Still, millions of children work across India.
 - (B) The children would be able to work if the company is owned by a family member.
 - (C) Making all child labor illegal could hurt small farmers, shopkeepers and others.
 - (D) The government knows poor parents need their children to work.

- 3 What information do you get from the following paragraph in the section "Working For Family Businesses"?

Numbers from the Indian government show that fewer children are working. In 2001, there were 12.6 million child workers in India. In 2011, there were 4.3 million. Still, these numbers may not count many children who work for family businesses.

- (A) The total number of child workers in India at all types of jobs.
 - (B) The decrease in the number of child workers in India.
 - (C) The number of children working for family businesses.
 - (D) The position of the Indian government on child labor.
- 4 Which of the following details belongs in a summary of the article?
- (A) Many of these children work in factories making clothes.
 - (B) The children would be able to work if the company is owned by a family member.
 - (C) [Parents] could be fined \$800 or sent to prison for two years.
 - (D) There is the feeling that if children cannot work, it will hurt Indian companies, said Prabhat Kumar.

Answer Key

- 1 According to the section "Working For Family Businesses," which of the following details helps explain why groups fighting for children's rights dislike changes to the working laws?
- (A) **Kids who work often drop out of school.**
 - (B) Children do need an education, but India is a poor country.
 - (C) Making all child labor illegal could hurt small farmers, shopkeepers and others.
 - (D) The new rules are trying to find a balance, India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, said.

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