

## Two couples, three kids rescued from bonded labour

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JAIPUR: Two families, comprising couples and three children, were rescued from bonded labour at a brick kiln in Daloowala village of Phagi tehsil in Jaipur on Tuesday.

Sub-divisional magistrate Sawan Kumar of Phagi told TOI, "We received information from Delhi-based social activist Nirmal Gorana and we sent a team of our men with him to the site. We found that the young couples had accepted an advance and had worked for some months at the kiln. However, when they expressed a desire to go home to Nagaur for Holi, the kiln owner refused permission. The couples have now been sent home, the rescue certificate too has been issued."

Gorana, who arrived in Jaipur on learning from an associate that the labourers were being held in bondage, told TOI, "I might have delayed coming, but was told that the wives of both these young men were in pretty advanced stages of pregnancy. And the women too were entering the kilns to remove bricks, exposing themselves to high temperatures. This is hard labour. One family had received an advance of Rs 35,000 some months ago and the other had received a slightly smaller sum. Both had been working since January. They wished to return to extended family in Nagaur for Holi, but the brick kiln owner said they would need to pay him back over Rs 70,000 to leave!"

Gorana, who called for an FIR especially since the rescued labourers were also Dalit, said the kiln owner had protested that he was taking care of their expenses. Also, both women had once visited the doctor since arriving at the kiln. The workers, however, protested that they had repaid the debt they owed, and should now be allowed to leave.

Raju Ram, speaking on phone from Nagaur, told TOI, "We tried to come away - we had been working there since January 12. We started work each day at about 6 am, sometimes earlier, and we would only finish at about 8 pm. There were about 200 workers in one kiln, and there was another one not far off with a similar number of workers. When we sought permission to leave for Holi, we were flatly denied permission. I'm now back at home. We are labourers, we will find work that we can do. Unfortunately, there is no work happening here under NREGA."

Although SDM Sawan Kumar said he had already issued release certificates in this case, the rehabilitation money will only be released once the court is satisfied that this is indeed a case of bonded labour.

In May last year, the Centre announced a steep hike in the rehabilitation money offered to bonded labourers who are rescued, from Rs20,000 to Rs1lakh. Women and minors are entitled to Rs 2lakh for rehabilitation under the scheme, and the most deprived and extremely marginalized - the disabled, women and children rescued from trafficking, sexual exploitation or transgenders - will get Rs3 lakh each. The money will remain in an annuity account controlled by the district magistrate and a monthly earning will flow to the beneficiary account. The corpus remains untouched until a decision is taken in the matter by the district magistrate.