

Behind

By Moham

“We wanted the kids not to (feel) prisoners... We wanted them to be counselled and taught... Something to remove the criminal element out of their minds,” dreams a mother and a social worker.

A prison sentence is intended as deprivation of liberty. But, all over the world, it usually means a violation and deprivation of many other human rights as well, including the right to (adult) education. Access to adult learning is not only a basic human right, it is also a crucial step towards the reintegration and the rehabilitation of prisoners.

According to a UNESCO report, in many countries, including industrialized ones, human rights abuses in prisons are still common. Prisoners are denied access to the most basic services such as personal hygiene, health and nutrition. Advocacy for the education of prisoners is therefore difficult, but vitally necessary.

Education is recognized internationally as a fundamental human right — but according to the United Nations Children's Fund 130 million children of school age in the developing world, 21 per cent of all school-age children, had no access to basic education in 1998. Nearly two-thirds of the children who are denied their right to education are female. Appropriately, the international community has identified girls' education as a critical priority.

It is a common belief, and rightly so, that a prison is the worst place to live. Either convicted or as under trial prisoners (UTPs), they have to live, under different circumstances, with feelings and sense of deprivation of various opportunities, needs and rights. Among such deprivations is education, which enlightens the mind and gives a direction for a new life.

But in the case of the Karachi Central Jail, the staff and management of Special Prison for Women and Juvenile Jail are committed to bringing about improvement in prisoners. It presents an excellent example of what can be achieved in various ways. Within a short time, the educational standard for detained people has undergone significant improvement, with the help of local philanthropists, education department and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The curriculum has been revised to focus on a range of skills and qualifications relevant to future employment and utilization.

A comprehensive survey was undertaken to assess the work of different organizations, and to explore the educational problems of these inmates. There are nearly 230 women prisoners, out of which only 18 have been convicted in different crimes. The rest are

mostly under trial prisoners (UTPs). There is a frequent turn over of these women, though most of them are under the Hudood Ordinance cases. There are 14 foreigners under the cases of drug trafficking. There are a total 45 children, out of which 25 are studying in Montessori, said Sheba Shah, Superintendent Special Prison for Women and Children, Karachi.

Adult education is being offered to 22 girls and women, of 20-35 years, with the help of a teacher who has been hired by a local NGO. They are being taught primary and secondary level government syllabus. Explaining the demand and need of women prisoners, she says that most of the women



A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE: Educational facilities in the Karachi jail are meticulously maintained by the young inmates themselves

are interested in shelter service, after getting release. As society does not accept them once they have been to a prison, most of the women do not want to leave even after their release.

For the economic empowerment and enhancement of their skills, All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) and Women's Peace Committee (WPC) are running industrial homes for girls and women in the prison where classes are organized thrice a week for these detainees. Nearly 22-25 women and girls are learning skills (embroidery, stitching, cutting, etc) for which they also get some money, depending upon their work, though the material is being provided by these NGOs.

Child Rights and Abuse Committee of Pakistan Paediatrics Association (PPA) established a montessori in jail in 1995. Rabia Minai of AMI helped in setting up the school, and appointed a teacher from her school and also donated some furniture. A local NGO supplies uniforms and bags to the children in the Montessori once a year, while the core expenses are managed by the PPA, says Dr Habiba Hassan, in charge of the project.

According to her, the PPA has been working for more than 12 years on child health and education, but it was in 1995 that the

the bars

Human rights

13 Jan Dawn

Ad Anwar

project on jail was initiated, which is now being funded by Save the Children, Sweden. Due to the bad law and order situation in Karachi a few years back, the school teachers left, and a few foreign prisoners were asked to take up teaching. They are currently being paid Rs500 each. These prisoners are teaching with enthusiasm and interest as they are getting incentives from the jail authorities in terms of deduction in their prison terms.

At present, four teachers are teaching 25 children; nothing is being charged as fee and the children are being provided with stationary and other necessary equipment. They are also running a Montessori in Peshawar jail, but Karachi jail's Montessori is a model, claim Dr Hassan.

Simultaneously, in the juvenile jail, one psychologist and one psychiatrist are also providing psychological assessment and counselling services to these children. Initially they focused on individual therapy but now they have extended the focus to group therapy.

A Government Childrens Home Secondary School has also been functioning for more than 35 years, which initially started functioning in the Landhi jail. In 1995 it was moved to its pre-

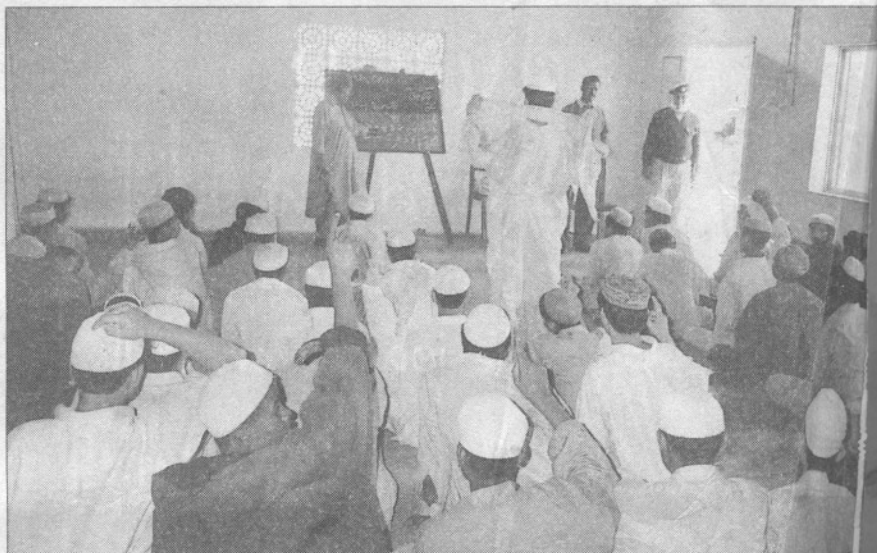
ond... ion and the minister for education... exemption of fee for these students.

They have recently started teaching the Jugnoo book series to these students. This initiative has been taken with the help of city government and a few NGOs. Quranic teaching is also an integral part of the curriculum. The school has a library, computer lab, and a functional dispensary.

We try to provide them with better skills so that they are better equipped to face the future, says the headmaster. The good thing is the willingness and curiosity among the children. For Youthful Offenders, the Jamiat-i-Taleem-ul-Quran and the Jail authorities are operating two industrial homes, in two shifts for 25 students. Four professional teachers train these students technical skills, including electronics, carpentry, TV repairing, hair cutting, embroidery etc.

Bright and confident, 15-year-old Naveed Ahmed was a conductor in a mini bus. He has been in detention for the last six months in a car-lifting case, in which he says he was not involved. He received his primary education (third class) from a government school, and later on dropped out because of the social and school environment, but later completed basic religious education.

About the education system in jail, he says that comparatively the jail education system is better than government schools for various reasons. The students in jail study because they want to do so, and not because they are forced into doing so. Most plan to continue with their education after getting released. He says the students in jail are exposed to the real value of education, and



sent premises. This school is being run with the cooperation of the education department, with a few teachers from the jail staff also helping out. At present, 110 out of 430 juvenile offenders are studying there.

The headmaster says that they are offering classes from one to 10, including subjects like science and arts. This year four students are expected to appear in the class 9 examination, while five in the matriculation. He has also requested the board of sec-

its practical application. Most of the boys belongs to poor families from areas like Lyari, Shorab Goth, Korangi, Malir and Mangopir etc. Recently, a juvenile court was established within the jail premises, but is not functioning properly.

The future plans of the jail authorities include getting 10 computers for students from some philanthropist so that the students can be better equipped to face the world outside. ■