

WORLD REPORT

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World View

Slavery, 20th-Century Style

■ In the Third World, bonded labor and child exploitation are widespread. Debt and greed set the trap; family burdens often perpetuate it.

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BANGKOK, Thailand—With her cherubic face, purple T-shirt and jeans, Mukda looks like a fairly typical 14-year-old from the rural areas of Thailand. She stands barely 4½ feet tall and giggles bashfully when asked a personal question.

Until police rescued her in late July, Mukda was a slave.

Eight months earlier, she had been brought to Bangkok from her village near the Myanmar border and sold to a brothel by her stepfather.

Every night, seven days a week, Mukda was forced to sleep with five or six men. The \$1 per customer she earned was written down in a ledger, to be offset against the amount paid to her stepfather.

Mukda was never allowed to leave the brothel, kept imprisoned behind a barbed-wire fence with a constant threat of beatings. When a Times reporter

found her during a police raid, she was curled up with 23 other girls on a foul-smelling floor of what looked like a stall in a stable.

"I want to go back to my village," she said in a tiny voice. "I'm afraid."



DILIP MEHTA / Contact Press Images

A rug factory in Benares, India, uses children as bonded labor.

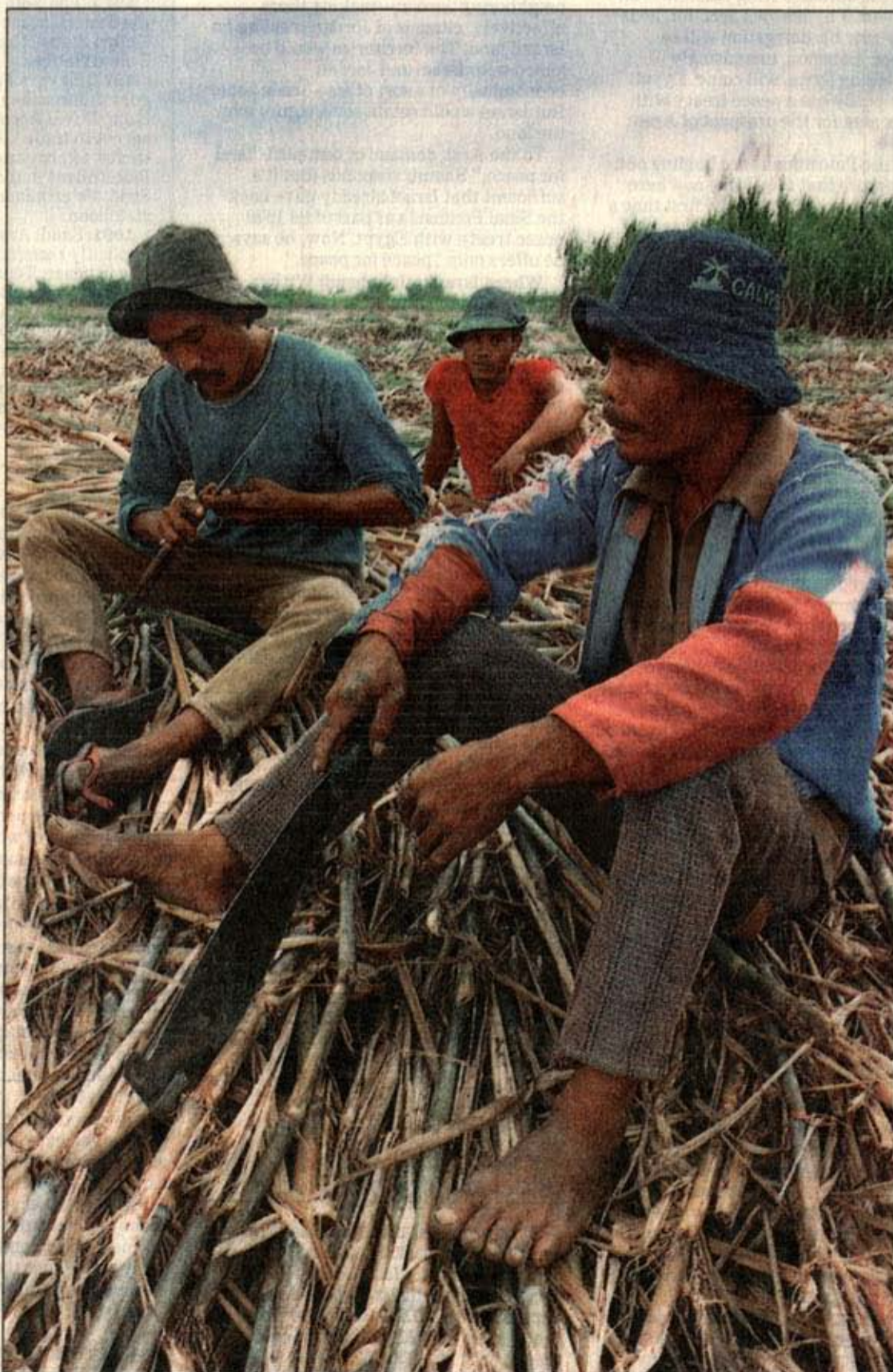
Slavery. It sounds like a relic of the distant past, a dinosaur of human behavior found in dramas like "Roots" and "Gone with the Wind." But more than a century after Lincoln freed the slaves in America, slavery in various forms is still widespread in the developing world.

"People in the West are told in school that slavery was abolished long ago, but sadly there are more slaves now than ever before," said Alan Whittaker, a spokesman for Anti-Slavery International, a London-based group founded in 1839 to fight the traffic in slaves from Africa.

"Today's slaves are not made by iron chains, they are made by debt and exploitation," Whittaker said in a telephone interview.

These days, it is relatively rare to find old forms of slavery in which people are sold at auction. So the focus of current anti-slavery efforts is aimed at ending the practice of bonded labor, where a worker spends years struggling to repay a debt, and the exploitation of child labor at little or no wages.

Forced labor is prohibited by a United Nations convention, as is hazardous work for children under



MARISSA ROTH / For The Times

Indentured workers in a Philippine sugar cane field. Laborers often begin working as children to help families pay generations-old debt. Below, girls forced to work as prostitutes at Thai brothel.