

Chained for a 'noble cause'

By Nadeem Saeed

DERA GHAZI KHAN, Feb 20: The recovery of a chained boy from a local religious school (Madressa) last week once again unveils the terrible ordeal minor students face to learn the Quran by heart.

The woes of eight-year-old Ameen came to light when a faithful offered prayers at Jamia Madina, Faridabad Colony, and found the minor in heavy chains which are usually used to chain buffaloes. The boy who was walking with a lot of difficulty had to take rest after a few steps.

The faithful who did not want to be identified approached madressa in charge Qari Muhammad Shafi and lodged his protest against the inhuman treatment being meted out to the minor. The Qari did not like his "interference" in the madressa affairs.

The man then brought the matter to the knowledge of the area magistrate, police and local newsmen. After remaining in confusion for two days, a joint team of the administration and newsmen raided the madressa and got the boy freed.

Amin told newsmen that he had learnt by heart the first two chapters of the Quran. He said he had been chained for the last one month as a punishment when he went out of the school to play with some neighbourhood children.

He said that the Qari did not unchain him even before going to bed or answering the nature's call. He was so hungry that he demanded food as soon as the raiding party removed his chains.

Some 20 other students were also there in the Jamia Madina. Although they were not in shackles they told newsmen that they had already faced a similar punishment.

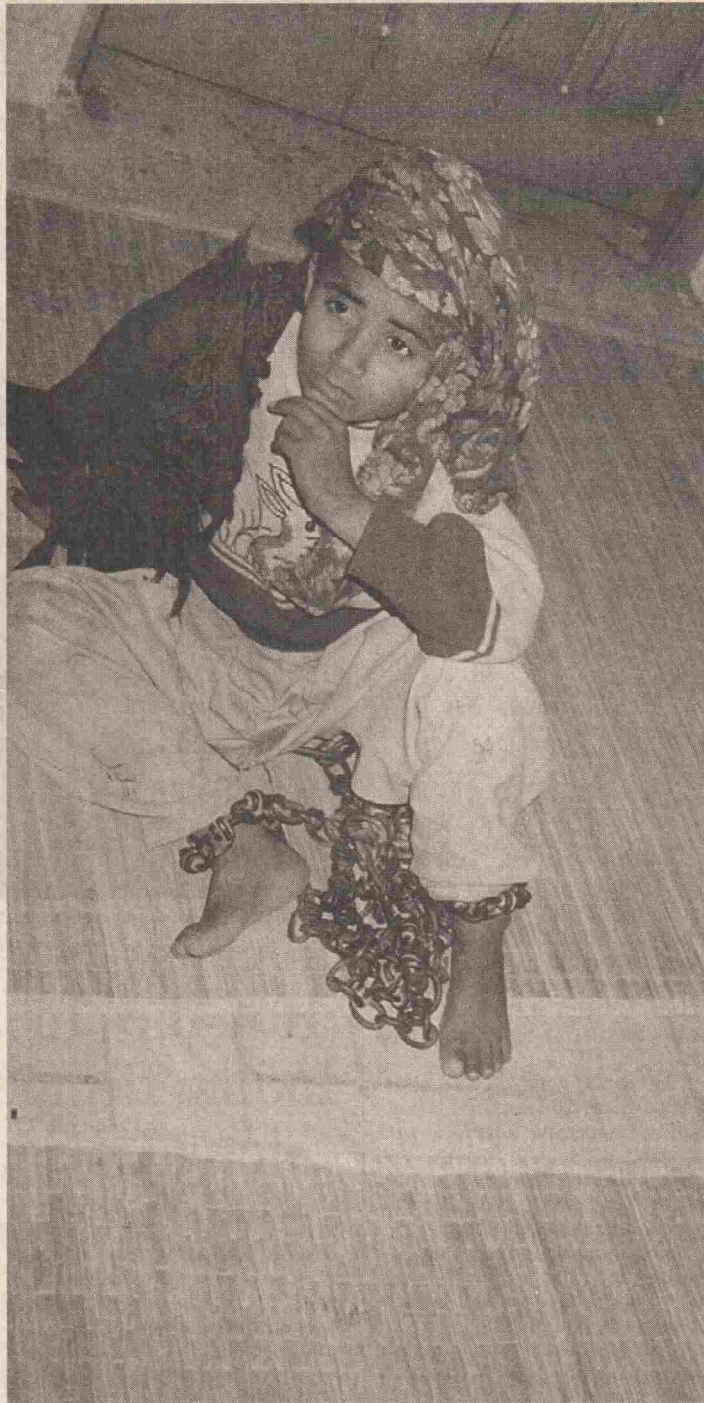
People of the area gathered there and raised slogans against the Qari and demanded a stern action. But, at the same time, a few also tried to defend the Qari Sahib.

At this, the duty magistrate did not arrest the Qari, fearing that his detention might create a law and order problem.

After rescuing the boy, the question of his lodging surfaced as his parents' home was more than 25 kilometres away from the city in Basti Rinda of Mauza Haji Kamand. He was taken to the 'nigehban' centre of the social welfare department for destitute children. But the centre was closed and none of its 13-member staff was there. Finally, he was taken to the civil lines. During this period police could not decide under which section action be taken against the Qari or boy's parents.

The next day Amin's father, Hafiz Yaqeen, was summoned. It was learnt that he also ran a madressa near his village.

Hafiz Yaqeen told police that he



EIGHT-year-old Ameen in chains. — Dawn

wanted his son become a 'hafiz'. "That is why I had authorised Qari Shafi to do whatever he deemed necessary to make Ameen a 'hafiz'.

The administration which lacked will to check this cruel practice handed over Amin to his father without giving him any warning. No case was registered against any person for subjecting the minor to severe torture.

Dera SSP Chaudhry Ahmed Khan Chadhar said the police could only take action under sections relating to illegal confinement. "But as the intention of chaining the minor was good and his father was also not willing to

pursue the case, there was no other option for police," he said.

Hundreds of students called 'talib' learn the Quran in countless religious schools of south Punjab. A vast majority of them come from rural areas which are dominated by poverty and illiteracy.

In almost all the schools the Talibs are treated like animals. The government does not take action against such schools due to its own weaknesses and the influence of religious leaders who themselves run such institutions.

The result is the on-going woes of hundreds of minor knowledge-seekers and terrorism in the name of religion.