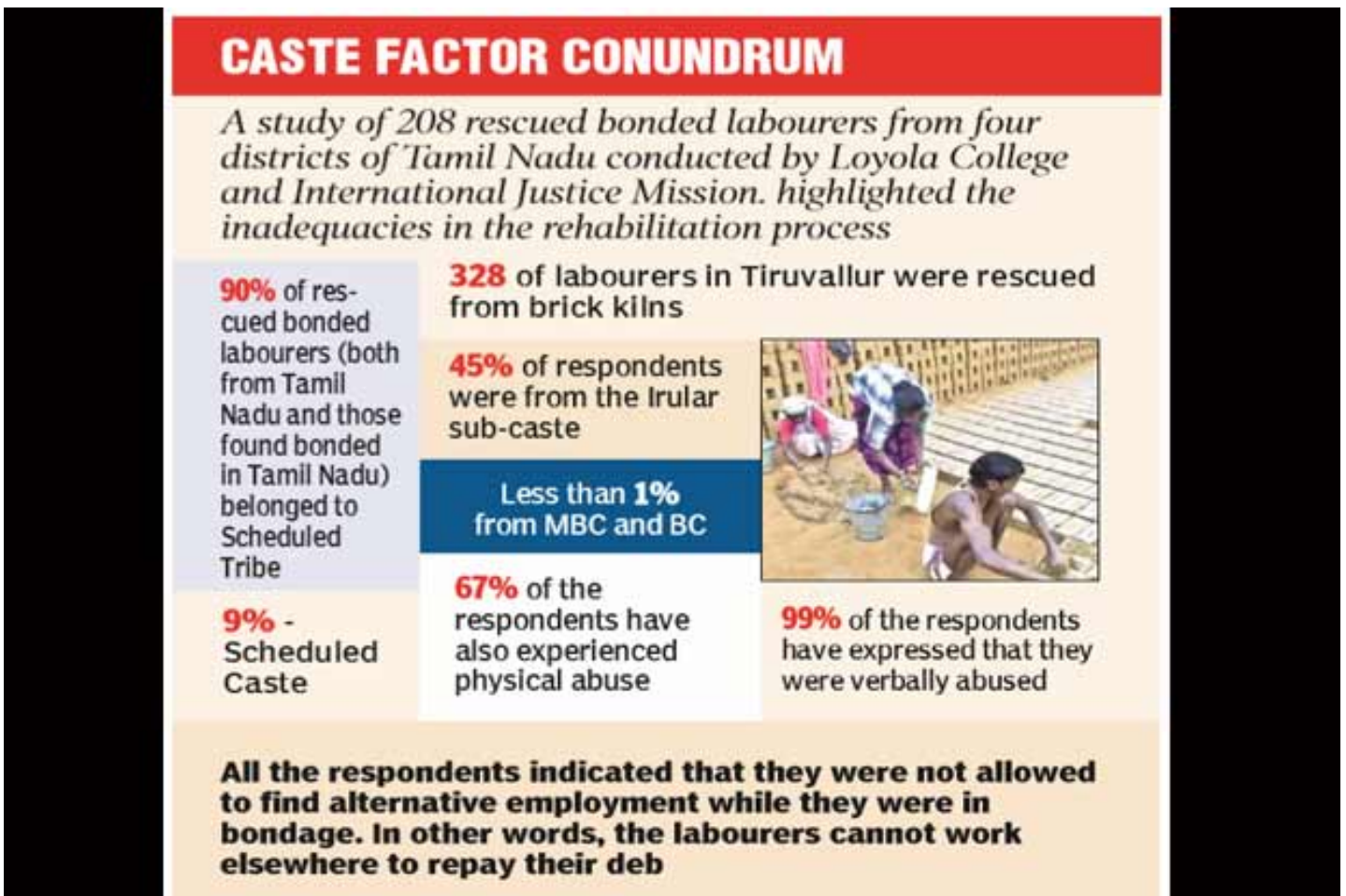


‘Generations of Irulas in clutches of bonded labour in Tamil Nadu’

Recent studies have revealed that 27 per cent of rescued bonded labourers were in a generational bond, who had been working to pay off the debts incurred by their ancestors.



Fact File
Chennai:

A state-level survey of bonded labour by Loyola College and International Justice Mission highlighted the challenges of rehabilitating bonded labourers across Tamil Nadu. T Kuralamuthan, Director of Research and Partnership, International Justice Mission, said, “The study showed that a sizeable percentage of the rescued bonded labourers were generational — two generations were under bonded labour until the third generation was rescued.” Gladston Xavier, Head, department of Social Work, Loyola College, said,

“The study revealed that a majority of the rescued bonded labourers were from the Scheduled Tribe, particularly the Irulas, the biggest tribal group in Tamil Nadu. Since the community is nomadic and lacks basic amenities and livelihood, they fall easily into the debt trap. Also, many take an advance, which has a huge interest. They are paying a huge interest on their salary,” he said. The debt also leads to abuse. “Almost all the respondents had faced some kind of abuse - verbal, physical, sexual or others,” said the academician. The study also revealed that 35 per cent of bonded labourers hesitated to approach the district administration to secure their release as they had no faith in the system.

“When we consulted the rescued bonded labourers, they said they needed skill development to ensure a livelihood. The biggest problem is that the rescued labourers (45%) end up migrating to other cities, carrying forth the vicious cycle. They’re unaware of the schemes they can avail,” said Kuralamuthan. Gladstone added that the government’s package is insufficient. “We want the package to be raised from Rs 20,000 to Rs 10 lakh along with housing and land,” he said.

WHEN RICE MILLS TURN HUMAN TRAPS

A majority (53.4%) of the participants were engaged as bonded labourers in rice mills

Agriculture	11.1%
Wood cutting	10%
Sugarcane mill	7.2%
Brick industry	6.3%
Coolie	4.8%
Poultry/cattle farm	4.3%
Gardening	1.9%
Quarry	1%

NO OF HOURS

45% of the participants said they were working for 11 to 15 hours per day, while 37% had reported working for 16 to 20 hours, one-tenth (10%) had reported working for 21 to 24 hours per day.