

Beggars removed from Delhi streets ahead of Commonwealth Games

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NEW DELHI (Kyodo) -- Police in Delhi have removed thousands of beggars and homeless urban poor from the city ahead of the Commonwealth Games that began here Monday, in what critics say is an effort to hide India's poverty from foreign visitors.

At various places throughout Delhi over the past week, police have come in with trucks, herded destitute people onto them and taken them away, according to local media.

"They haven't been seen back since then," said a local resident of Nizamuddin, a place where a large number of beggars could normally be spotted any time of the day.

As many as 40,000 beggars and homeless people may have been removed from the city or confined in homes for vagrants, according to local media.

In addition, thousands of migrant workers from the countryside, some of whom had worked on facilities built for the Games, have also reportedly been sent home by train and told not to return within the next 20 days. The Games will last until Oct. 14.

Paramjeet Kaur, director of Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan, a nongovernmental organization working for the rights of homeless people, accused police of unleashing a reign of terror in which the homeless are now reluctant to appear on the streets for fear they will be beaten up by police teams patrolling areas frequented by beggars.

She warned that some of them will starve during the period of the Games as they do not get food to eat.

Kaur said instead of throwing the homeless out of the city, the government should have launched an integrated program under which they could have been provided shelter and food during the Games.

Aashray Adhikar Abhiyan estimates some 100,000 people usually sleep on the streets of Delhi.

It says they are not only deprived of civic amenities such as water and sanitation and are denied access to shelter and medical treatment, but they are also forced to work for below the minimum wage and face beatings and harassment from police.

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