

COTTON SLAVES

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In Uzbekistan cotton is the backbone of the economy. The industry is kept alive by slave labor and excessive irrigation.

With about 4 million tons annually Uzbekistan is the third largest exporter of cotton after the United States. Cotton accounts for a third of the country's foreign exchange income. It is the backbone of Uzbekistan's economy and regime and also its environmental curse. The irrigation needed to keep the level of cotton high, drains the rivers and turns the soil to desert. On every cotton field an average four meters of water is needed during the year to grow cotton. But only half of this water is needed for growing the plants; the other half is used to wash the salt of the last season away from the soil.

The regime of president Islam Karimov forces hundred thousands students and school children as young as eight to work in the cotton fields for three months annually.

IMAGE 1

All over Uzbekistan hundreds of thousand university students and schoolchildren are forced to work during the cotton harvest. The government strictly organizes the transports into the cotton fields. Only for medical reasons students are spared from the hard labor, so the going rate for the medical form rises to about 150 \$US.

IMAGE 2

Cotton is the backbone of Uzbekistan's economy and accounts for a third of the country's foreign exchange income. With about 4 million tons annually Uzbekistan is the third largest exporter of cotton after the United States. Cotton is the backbone of Uzbekistan's regime and also its environmental curse. The cotton plants are carefully guarded not only from terrorists but also from journalists ? which is basically the same in the eye of the regime of President Islam Karimov.

IMAGE 3

Gigantic posters advertise cotton. Contrary to the advertisement most cotton is hand picked as forced labor is cheaper than maintaining machines.

IMAGE 4

During the cotton harvest the government organizes all available transportation to bring the students to the fields all around the country.

IMAGE 5

A young boy waits in his room for his call of duty in the cotton fields.

IMAGE 6

A young boy harvests cotton in Uzbekistan. School children as young as eight are forced to work in the cotton fields for three month annually.

IMAGE 7

The irrigation needed to keep the level of cotton high, drains the rivers and turns the soil to desert. On every cotton field an average four meters of water is needed during the year to grow the cotton. But only half of this water is needed for growing the plants; the other half is used to wash the salt of the last season away from the soil.

IMAGE 8

A girl protects her arms against the sharp edges of the cotton plants.

IMAGE 9

Early in the morning students get ready to harvest cotton. The shift ends when it is getting dark.

IMAGE 10

Irrigation canals connect the rivers to the cotton fields in the desert. Most of the water is lost through evaporation before it reaches the fields.

Cluster: White Gold ? Dying Sea

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