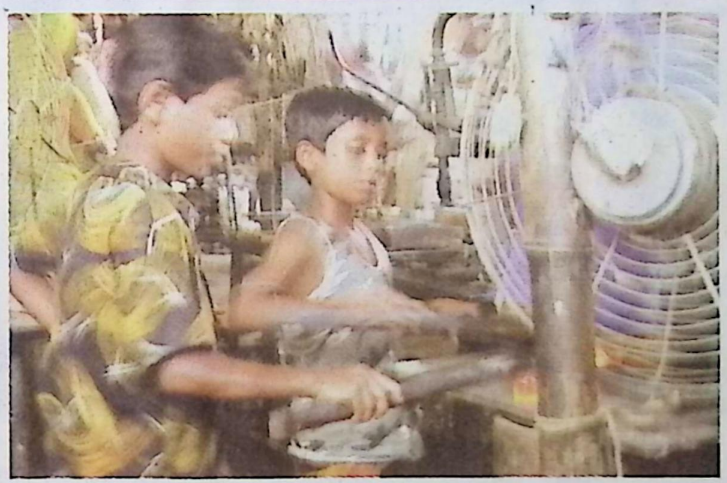
such as textbooks, girls' washrooms and the absence of an overall child-friendly environment at schools which forces many students to drop out. Despite being "literate", the level of education of students, i.e., the quality of the education gained is questionable. The budget allocation is inadequate in the sense that more funds go into infrastructure development than in ensuring quality education through the training of teachers, the availability of textbooks, etc. There is no curriculum that provides bilingual education for linguistic minorities. In terms of child labour, what is "hazardous work" is unclear, while the lack of proper certification also results in children younger than the legal age of 14 entering the workforce. In the informal sector, children are basically treated as young adults, verbally and physically abused and with no scope to report these abuses.





Lack of proper certification also results in children younger than the legal age of 14 entering the workforce.

Criminal laws of the country result in children constantly falling victim to the justice system. Children are approached as criminals who need to be punished rather than rehabilitated. "'Correction centres' have been changed to 'development centres' in name only," said human rights activist Dr. Hameeda Hossain. The age of criminal liability, which has been increased from seven to nine years of age, should be further increased, said Hossain, for a child of nine can hardly be held responsible for criminal acts.

With regards to special protection, there are no long-term provisions for street children who are the most vulnerable and who are often forced to commit illegal acts. Though there are laws against child prostitution, the State has turned a blind eye, claims the alternative report. Overall, not only are children not protected outside the home but even within the family.

The spirit of the Children's Act of 1974 is not embraced, claimed speakers at the seminar. "Bangladesh is yet to be a child-friendly nation," said Shahana Siddiqui, Consultant, MJF.

Recommendations of the report included a five-year plan to target areas which need attention, allocate adequate budgets, etc; greater transparency, not only in financial matters but also in terms of work being done by different NGOs so that they do not overlap; advocacy for child rights and child-sensitive projects and programmes on the part of both the government and NGOs, prioritising children in different sectors such as health, etc., and strengthening coordination and reporting mechanisms between the government and NGOs as well as between NGOs. The report stresses the importance of the government, NGOs and civil society in working together to identify problems, find and implement solutions in order to ensure the rights of the child.

Among recommendations made by the participants at the seminar -- which included chief guest Rasheda K. Chowdhury, Advisor to the Caretaker Government, Women and Children's Affairs, Primary and Mass Education and Cultural Affairs; special guest Dr. Hameeda Hossain and Executive Director of MJF, Shaheen Anam -- were a coordinated and combined report by the NGOs to the UNCRC, including a draft in simple Bangla for NGO workers at the grassroots; institutionalisation of monitoring; and increased coordination, dialogue and networking at the local level. Most importantly, the speakers recognised the importance of understanding children and their rights and providing them with their basic needs in a child-friendly environment, which recognises their vulnerability and specialty. ■