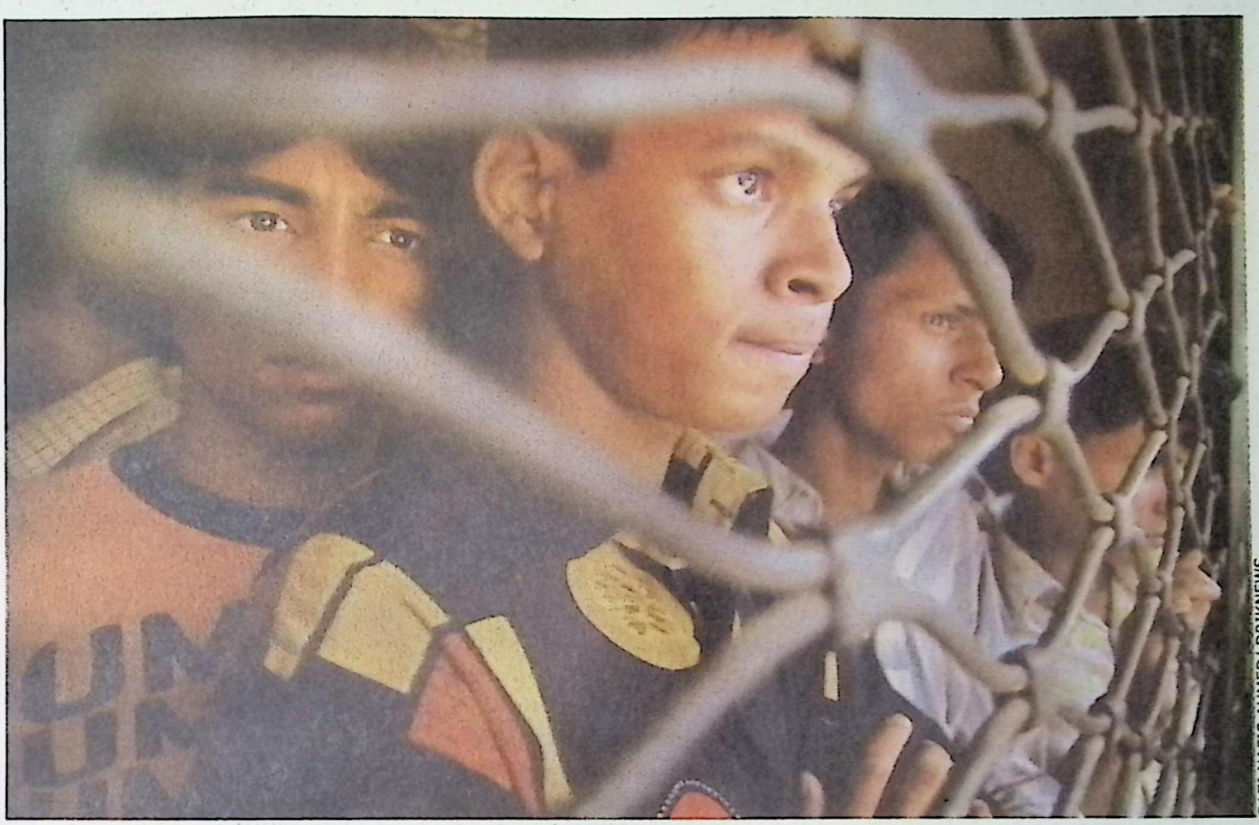


GAZI NAFIS AHMED/ DRIKNEWS

Rights (CRC). There were a score of other international obligations Bangladesh had inherited as a successor state to Pakistan.

Ratification imposes specific obligations on a state to incorporate human rights into national laws, to amend legislation, to promote, protect and fulfill human rights, and to prevent violations of human rights through its policies and practices. It also agreed to submit periodical reports on measures taken in fulfillment of its commitments, and to set up machineries to monitor and check violations.

Most states find escape clauses to dilute their commitments. Bangladesh is no exception. To start off, it tempered its obligations by placing reservations on specific articles, particularly those that were instrumental in promoting equality, non-discrimination, etc.

For example, Article 2 of CEDAW, which is fundamental to elimination of discrimination remains under reservation, notwithstanding promises by successive governments to consider its withdrawal.

Few steps have been taken to incorporate human rights standards into domestic laws. This may be attributed in part to a lack of enlightenment and weakness of the bureaucratic machinery. As a result, domestic jurisdiction has not been sensitive to human rights. A more serious lapse has been the state's failure to submit periodical reports on measures taken to implement human rights.

The initial report to the UN Committee against Torture was due in 1999 and to the ICESCR and ICCPR in 2000 and 2001. It may have embarrassed the ministries concerned to deny the violations of the right to life (Article 6 of the ICCPR and Articles 32, 33 of the Constitution of Bangladesh) by state agencies (including all law enforcement and security agencies), but reviews by an international body may have injected an element of accountability into methods of law enforcement.

Bangladesh has reported faithfully to two committees, CEDAW and CRC, but governments have defaulted on taking note of the committees' Concluding Observations and implementing their recommendations so that we could have benefited from policy initiatives.

It was left to human rights defenders to inform the UN committees on the situation of human rights by submitting shadow reports, investigating violations, and campaigning for an end to impunity for lawless law enforcement by state agencies, by challenging laws and institutions that violate human rights standards. Often, human rights defenders have been accused of "spoiling the image of Bangladesh," "conspiracy," and