

24 APR 1996

২৪ এপ্রিল ১৯৯৬

Elimination Of Child Labour In Bangladesh—II

Daud-uz-Zaman Chowdhury

With the implementation of other programmes launched by the Government and the NGOs, this undesirable but socially unavoidable situation in Bangladesh will be overcome within a short period.

While enforcement of labour laws continues, measures are also underway to explore avenues to take up schemes for rehabilitation of displaced workers. It should be appreciated that in Bangladesh apparel industries sector has become an important source of employment for the disadvantaged and the vulnerable group of population—the workmen. Their very employment has made a significant contribution towards eradication of poverty and upliftment of socio-economic conditions in general, and employment of women in particular.

In the meantime the government has already signed a MOU with International Programme for Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)/ILO with the aim of promoting conditions to progressively prohibit, restrict and regulate child labour as well as it increase awareness in the national and international community of the consequences of and solution to the child labour problems. A National Tripartite Steering Committee formed with the Secretary,

Ministry of Labour and Manpower as the convenor has also been working since early 1995 in order to achieve the said objectives.

In an agrarian economy the connotation given to 'child work' may be problematic because children take part in various activities and for different reasons. Children perform purely household activities, various productive work within the family and sometimes also work as wage labour outside the household. They work either to assist their parents or to learn certain skills purely for reasons of survival. In order that such activities do not become detrimental to their physical and mental development, primary education has been made compulsory. Education for girls in rural areas has been made free upto the class eight. 'Food for Education Programme' for the poor students is in operation in the rural areas of the country for the last two years very successfully. This successful programme has been formulated with a view to minimise malnutrition, also to minimise school drop-outs and mainly for poverty alleviation.

Measures taken by the BGMEA

The Bangladesh Garment Manu-

facturers and Exporters' Association (BGMEA) has also taken the some measures some of which are as follows:

a. The full text of the Harkin Bill, introduced in the US Congress by Senator Tom Harkin, entitled "Child Labour Deterrence Act of 1993" had been circulated to all the members of the BGMEA, cautioning them to take a serious note of it and ensure implementation of the labour laws in this respect. (Members, although, hold the view that they are not benefited by employing child labour, as they are often compelled to employ wards of their female workers, who accompany them upto the factories in order to enable those female workers to continue to work.)

b. The fortnightly newsletter of the BGMEA is carrying notices warning their members to desist from employing children in violation of labour laws.

d. A number of sub-committees have been formed to monitor the matter and report to the Executive Committee of the BGMEA in the event of employment of children by its members.

As a result of the measures taken by BEMEA, a large number of child workers have already lost their job. For rehabilitation of those displaced children, BGMEA started various programmes in co-operation with UNICEF and the NGOs like, Shishu Adhikar Forum, Underprivileged Children's Education Programme (UNCEP).

Nari Maitri, etc. Recently a MOU has been signed between ILO/UNICEF and the BEMEA in order to progressively rehabilitate the displaced children. The combined initiatives taken by various Ministries of the Government, the UN Agencies and NGOs have already resulted in developing an integrated action programme aiming at the rehabilitation of displaced child workers from the garment industry, for their welfare, education and subsistence. The Ministry of Social Welfare has also been continuing their efforts for rehabilitation of the displaced child labour.

The writer, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Labour and Manpower, Government of Bangladesh recently presented this paper at a seminar in Islamabad, Pakistan.