

7990 former child workers enrolled in MOU schools

Staff Correspondent

A total of 7990 former child workers in the garment factories have been enrolled in 315 schools till December 1996 under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to free the garment factories from child labour.

The schools known as "MOU schools" are run by NGOs like Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Gano Shaharya Sangstha (GSS). January 31 is the first anniversary of the commencement of the education programme for former child workers released from garment factories.

According to a UNICEF study that following declaration by BGMEA, there had been checking by ILO monitoring teams in December 1996 who found that factories by and large were free from child labour. BRAC and GSS have allowed these children to attend school pending verification by ILO BGMEA.

Of the total 10,546 children enumerated in the initial factory survey, 5118 have now turned 14. They are legally eligible to work in a factory or other establishments. Im-

plementing agencies have agreed with regard to children who have already been admitted to encourage and allow them to remain in MOU schools even after attaining 14 years of age until they complete their basic education.

The drop-out rate from these MOU schools is as low as five per cent. The most recent drop-outs are those who are now legally eligible for employment. Others continue to leave school because they need to work full-time in other jobs or because they cannot afford to live in the city and have to return to their villages.

Children attending the MOU schools are getting cash stipends provided by BGMEA and ILO. The cash stipends so far distributed among the children of MOU schools amounted to Tk 44,31,768. A total of 5017 enrolled children have received stipends for the period covering upto November 1996. Stipend money is to be distributed among enrolled students by the 10th of the following month, distribution of stipend money for the month of December 96 is

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delayed as new system of distribution is going to be introduced from January 1997. The Agreement between the ILO and the Social Investment Bank has just been concluded. UNICEF termed it as a positive development that the Social Investment Bank is taking the responsibility for the distribution of stipend money.

Since the Declaration by BGMEA that the garment sector is free from child labour as of October 31, 1996, monitoring of factories by ILO is continuing. During the intensive monitoring, it found that approximately 68 per cent of the factories had no child labour. In December 1996 to January 1997, the ILO monitors again carried out monitoring visits to factories and found that by and large the garment factories were not employing children. They found only few cases of violation.