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7,990 enrolled in 315 schools

## Breakthrough in educating garment child workers

Staff Reporter

Bangladesh has achieved a breakthrough in educating the former child workers released from garment factories in the country.

In just one year 315 schools have been established and so far 7,990 former garment workers have been enrolled in these schools.

Today, the January 31st, is the first anniversary of the commencement of education programme for former child workers of garment factories in the country.

On this day last year, the first school was established to receive former child garment workers. Since then, so far 315 schools have been set up as part of the follow-up to the pioneering Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), UNICEF and ILO.

Till now, some 7,990 chil-

dren, all former garment factory workers, are enrolled in schools. They are writing a new chapter in the history of the movement to end child labour and create learning opportunities for working children in Bangladesh.

According to UNICEF, in implementation of the agreement, BGMEA, UNICEF and ILO conducted a joint survey from July to November, 1995 to find out the actual number of child workers employed in garment factories. The survey found out that nearly 1.2 million workers in the garment factories, most of them women, 10,547 were children under 14 years of age.

There were four key provisions formulated in the MOU. Those were the removal of all under age workers—those below 14 by October 1995 no further hiring of under-age children; the placement of those children removed from the garment factories in appropriate educa-

tional programmes with a monthly stipend; the offer of the children's jobs to qualified family members. The MOU explicitly directed factory owners, in the best interests of these children, not to dismiss any child workers until factory survey was completed and alternative arrangements could be made for the freed children.

The costs and tasks of implementation are being shared among the three MOU signatories and partner NGOs. BGMEA and ILO are financing the monthly stipends of Tk 300 given to enrolled children to help compensate their lost wages. The schooling is being funded by UNICEF, with schools set up and run by two partner NGOs—the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Gono Shahajjo Shangstha (GSS). The schooling consists of a three-year curriculum. The students are free to return to work once they reach 14.