

## **'Enrolment of children at primary schools close to target'**

The current net enrolment of children at primary schools stands at 82 per cent and completion of their education at 60 per cent which is close to the target set for the year 2000.

The government has resolved to increase net enrolment in primary schools and completion of education from 60 per cent and 43 per cent in 1990 to 95 per cent and 70 per cent respectively by the year 2000. The country's primary-school aged children, stands at 19.6 million, according to the 'Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children's Project (BEHTRUC)'.

The project, a joint initiative of Bangladesh government and the UNICEF, with support from Sweden and the United Kingdom, aims at providing non-formal basic education to 351,000 working children in six urban areas — Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet — to protect them from exploitative and hazardous working conditions.

According to the project pro-

file, the schools numbering 4,200 till January this year with a total 1,26,00 children enrolled, are being managed by about 150 NGOs who have been participating in this project through the Directorate of Non-Formal Education.

More than 50 per cent of the enrolled children in these schools are girls, UNICEF officials told BSS adding that local government bodies as well as city and municipal corporation authorities have been extending cooperation towards effective management of the project activities.

The project has been especially designed to meet the educational needs of the working children living in urban slums. Over one-fifth of the country's population now live in urban areas and the government estimates this number will be nearly 30 per cent by the year 2000.

UNICEF officials said this project with a long-term investment for developing educa-

tion for all children in Bangladesh, was providing an opportunity for children-friendly learning environment along with access to information, interactive learning, life skills, awareness about all forms of exploitation and scope to build children self-esteem and self-confident.

As part of the project, teachers from participating NGOs receive initial and follow-up training in the curriculum and also visit homes of children to monitor their progress and communicate with their guardians.

Children account for about 56 per cent of urban slum inhabitants with most of them working to help support their families. In some families, the project profile said, child labour accounts for one-third of the family's income coming from brick-breaking, food or flower sale, domestic work, rickshaw-pulling, welding, auto mechanics and many other odd jobs.