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## \$150m WB aid for primary education

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The World Bank has announced US dollars 150 million (about Taka 700 crore) credit to Bangladesh to commence a new "primary education development programme" under the five-year plan.

In the five-year plan, the Government has designed a primary education development programme to be implemented from 1998 to 2003. Total cost for the project has been estimated at US dollars 2 billion, of which the Government will allocate US dollars 340.9 million from its budget. The rest amount will be provided by different development agencies as interest-free credit, refundable within the next 50 years. The agencies are the Asian Development Bank (ADB), UK Department for International Development, Islamic Development Bank (IDB), the

government of Norway and Sweden, UNICEF, KfW Germany and the International Development Association (IDA), the lending arm of the World Bank.

Most of the development agencies have already declared their financial assistance when the World Bank announced its credit on Tuesday to support the project.

The targets of project are to boost the net enrolments from present 85 per cent to 95 per cent, increase primary school completion rates from 60 per cent to 70 per cent and reduce drop-out rates over the next five years.

The project will give priority to raise enrolments of girls and poor student in selected urban areas and undeserved rural communities, and

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improvement of education administration.

Announcing the credit for the project, an official handout issued from World Bank Dhaka office on Tuesday said that the credit would help Bangladesh Government to accomplish the project to improve the education system in the primary level and enhance equitable access to schools in those areas that were still underserved.

"Bangladesh has made great strides in increasing enrolment in primary education since the early 1990s, and more recently, in secondary education, especially for girls. But the quality of education and low learning achievement are still a problem", the handout quoted Audrey, Aarons, an education specialist in the South Asia Education Sector Unit of the World Bank.

According to the Bank, about 3 million children in the 6 to 10 years age group do not enter primary school. Most of them come from the poorest communities in both urban and rural areas and from tribal group in the Chittagong region.

To ensure primary education of the poor and disadvantage children, the project is aimed at to facilitate enrolments of additional 14.2 million children per year till 2003, the Bank pointed out.

It said that the project would provide a better balance of student textbooks and supplementary reading materials and teachers guides free-of-charge at all schools which would contain the public cost of provision through nationwide book reuse programme in class three to class five.

Under the project, a good number of new school building will be constructed in the under developed areas across the country. Besides, it will support to reform of education policy including decentralising planning budgeting and ensuring all recognised non-government schools receive subsidies.

"By expanding enrolment and improving quality of primary education, the project is expected to make a major contribution to better educated workforce in Bangladesh", the World Bank observed.