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# Universal free primary education by 1985

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By Mostafiz Kamal

The Government plans to introduce universal free primary education in the country by 1985.

The programme, which is likely to commence by 1979, will be implemented in phases over a period of five to seven years depending on the availability of funds.

According to a Ministry of Education source the Taka 150 to 200 crores programme will be aided by the World Bank. A World Bank delegation came to Bangladesh a couple of months ago and studied an outline of the programme. The detailed programme, now being prepared, will be reviewed by the bank.

The National Education Commission in its report submitted to the Government in May 1974 had proposed in-

roduction of universal education upto junior secondary level (Class VIII) by 1983. The proposal was found financially impracticable.

Under the programme, all children in the primary age group between 6 and 10 years (now more than 135.5 lakh) will be enrolled. This will require increase in the number of primary schools by about 10 per cent, from 36,165 to 40,000.

The Government, however, is not much concerned about linear expansion of schools, because except in some backward areas the primary schools are located at the walking distance of children in both urban and rural areas. The Government's endeavour will be mainly to extend physical and other facilities, so that the

schools could take in increased number of students.

The Government will not allow any private primary school to continue once the goal of Universal Primary Education is attained, the source said. At present, there are 3,838 non-government primary schools and 3,275 primary sections attached to junior high schools in the country.

The programme suggests holding of classes in two shifts — one between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. for classes I and II and the other during the usual school hours.

School hour for classes between III and V is recommended for ensuring optimum use of available physical facilities in the schools. This arrangement will also in effect

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help attain a better teacher-student ratio.

What will be the additional number of teachers required for implementing the programme is now being worked out, the source said. There are about 1,50,000 government primary teachers in the country now. Women candidates are likely to be given preference in matters of appointment, as women appear to be better teachers, children for the source said.

Asked how all children of the primary age group would be made to go to schools, the source said that the Government was considering a law in this connection.

The Government hopes to be able to introduce some sort of a nutritional programme in the schools. This part will be an inter-ministerial responsibility.

As for measures to improve the standard of education at this level, the Government has already undertaken a Taka II crore programme to develop Primary Teachers' Training Institutes. There are 47 PTIs in the country. These institutes have already trained about 90 per cent of the teachers now in profession. The remaining 10 per cent of the teachers will undergo similar training. Under the present programme, teachers will be given pre-service training before their formal appointment, the source said.

Under the programme, a public examination at the end of Class V, may be introduced. If this is done, the Thana education offices may have to organise them and the Thana Education Offices will possibly work as certificate awarding

authorities. Such public examinations have already been introduced in some areas of the country on experimental basis the source said.

In order to ensure a uniform standard for schools in the country, regular academic and administrative inspections of educational institutions will be ensured, and the Government has already instructed the local government bodies to supervise the activities of the educational institutions in their respective localities.

The source indicated that the Government wished to sternly deal with education officials against whom there are complaints of corruption. The 'supervisory levels' of educational administration were to be especially streamlined, and, in fact disciplinary measures have already been taken against some. Periodic seminars, workshops and the like are being organised in order to help education officials raise their level of efficiency.