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Plan for free uniform goes

By A Staff Correspondent

The Government has abandoned the programme of free distribution of uniform among primary students from the year 1983-84 after spending about Taka 15 crore.

Under the programme launched in 1981-82 about 24 lakh sets of uniform were distributed to 13 lakh boys and 11 lakh girls of class II during 82-83.

Government decided to distribute free uniform and textbooks among students up to Class V under universal primary education project. The policy was aimed at giving incentive to students for containing the large scale dropout at the primary level. Taka 40.72 crore were earmarked for distribution of free uniform in the Second Five-Year plan.

However, the programme of free distribution of text-books to primary students is still going on. A total of one crore seventeen lakh sets of textbooks for Classes I, II and III were distributed at a cost of Taka 14 crore till December last.

The programme of free supply of uniform had to be cancelled due to corruption and mismanagement in the making and distribution mechanism of uniform. When the programme was launched, Taka four crore were given to Thana Education Officers and C.Os for making uniforms locally and to distribute those to students. Complaints of corruption, bad quality of cloth and mismanagement in distribution system were received from teachers, guardians and students of more than 400 thanas.

After the initial failure in the programme, arrangements were planned to supply uniforms centrally from the Directorate of Primary Education. Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation (BTMC) agreed to supply cloths and eleven reput-

ted garment manufacturing firms were selected through open tender for making the uniforms.

An official of the Primary Education Directorate complained that bulk of the cloth supplied by BTMC was of bad quality and the Corporation charged higher price for that. He also complained about lapses in the distribution system of uniforms at the sub-division and thana (present upazila) level. Huge quantity of uniforms were also damaged in godowns at the thana level, he reported.

A high official of the Ministry of Education said that actions were taken against many officers at the sub-division and thana level for corruption and mismanagement in the distribution of uniforms. More cases are still pending, he informed.

The Education Ministry official also complained about inflated demand for free text-books for primary students due to manipulation at distribution level. In 1983 the demand for Class I books was 25 lakh sets but this year the demand has increased to five lakh and same way the demand for Class II books was 18 lakh in 1983 and for the current year 22 lakh sets.

According to an official estimate, the total number of students up to Class V now stands at 87 lakh in 36,666 government primary schools and 7000 privately owned primary schools. The number of primary teachers will exceed one lakh fifty thousand.

Education experts observe that to avoid large number of drop outs in the primary level some sort of incentives must be given to students who mainly come from lower income group. They also argue that to make the universal primary education programme successful the drop out trend must be