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Bill soon for compulsory free primary education

By A Staff Reporter

Education Minister Sheikh Shahidul Islam said on Thursday that the Government would soon introduce a bill to make primary education compulsory in the country.

Winding up the debate on two resolutions moved by two independent MPs on the private

members' day, Sheikh Shahid said that the Government was also making efforts to make education free upto class VII.

He said that no Government had in the past framed a law to give effect to the constitutional provision of making primary education compulsory and universal.

He said that the Government of President Ershad had the political will to fulfill this constitutional obligation and also to implement the recommendations of the Mafizuddin Ahmed Education Commission.

The two resolutions calling for making education free upto class VIII and to make education of children of the age group of 6 to 10 years compulsory from 1990, were moved by Mr. Mia Abbasuddin and Mr. Nurul Islam Moni, respectively.

While Mia Abbasuddin with-

drew his resolution on the assurance given by the Education Minister, Mr. Nurul Islam Moni declined doing so thus initiating a heated debate on the constitutionality of putting the resolution to vote.

The leader of the opposition Mr. A.S.M. Abdur Rab told the house that putting the resolution relating to the making of education compulsory for children of six to ten years would be unconstitutional, because it would violate the constitutional provision for making elementary education free and compulsory.

The Leader of the House Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Irrigation Minister Mr. Mahbubur Rahman and Education Minister Sheikh Shahidul Islam argued that although the Government had nothing in principle

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to say against the resolution, it might not agree with the whole statement while framing a bill.

Mr. Mahbubur Rahman said that Mr. Moni's resolution called for making education compulsory only for children of the age group of six to ten years whereas article 17 of the constitution states that education should be made compulsory for all children.

Mr. Rab repeatedly said that he did not want the constitution to be violated. Chief Whip of the opposition Mr. Nur Alam

Ziku also made similar contentions.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nurul Islam Moni took the floor saying he was amending the resolution by removing the words six to ten years, meaning that primary education should be made compulsory for all.

As Deputy Speaker Mr. Reazuddin Ahmed accepted the argument and put the resolution to vote, and COP MPs and some independent members under the leadership of Mr. A.S.M. Abdur Rab staged a walk out. Five opposition bench members representing JSD (Siraj) Freedom Party and Independents remained in the house and voted in favour of the resolution which was rejected by the house by a voice vote.

Earlier Mia Abbasuddin, Mr. Ataur Rahman and Mr. Nur Alam Ziku spoke in support of the first resolution. Mr. Nurul Islam Moni, Abdul Hamid Talukdar of COP, Maj. (Retd) Bazlul Huda of FP, Moktar Ahmed of COP and the leader of the opposition Mr. A.S.M. Abdur Rab spoke in support of the second resolution.

Sheikh Shahidul Islam said that the government was contemplating to spread non-formal education alongside formal education, and actively considering the proposal for starting two shifts to accommodate more students in schools.

Sheikh Shahid said that the spending on the education head increased four times from 1982 to 1989. The universal primary education plan was being implemented in phases to reduce dropout rate, which was not only due to poverty of parents, but also because of lack of awareness about education and the negligence of a section of the teachers.