

# Govt plans expansion of free education

## Planning ministry meets soon to discuss free education for all in public institutions

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The government is planning to make education free for all at public institutions ranging from schools to universities.

Besides, it plans to form a trust fund to provide stipend to the meritorious and deserving students at all levels.

These moves have been initiated following a directive by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The planning ministry is now set to hold a meeting with Planning Minister AK Khandoker in the chair to chalk out how free education can be introduced soon.

Currently, education is free for all at the primary level. At the secondary and

higher secondary level, around 18 lakh out of 45 lakh female students receive government stipend under a certain criterion.

The students who receive the stipend get free education as well.

The total number of students covering all kinds of schools, colleges and universities presently stands at around 85 lakh, with more than half of it under private education system.

However, the students of the private sector would remain out of the free education once it is introduced.

A planning ministry high official said the prime minister has given a broad guideline in the light of which the high-

powered meeting will fix the principles and strategies for implementing the initiative.

The official added the meeting would formulate detailed guidelines whether all schools and colleges included in the MPO would come under this initiative.

The finance minister, education minister, the prime minister's adviser for finance and other high officials will attend the meeting, which will soon discuss the matter.

Planning ministry sources say the prime minister in her handwriting issued the directive on April 20 while presiding

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over the Ecnct meeting.

In the directive she said male and female students studying in all public educational institutions will be given stipend every month. The aim of the stipend is to create a scope for education for boys and girls up to the degree level.

She also mentioned about formation of a trustee fund which will be formed through government grant or one-time lump sum donation whichever is easier.

Alongside government money, private grant can also be taken in the trustee fund and private donors can be given tax waiver at a specific rate.

The premier also said a trustee board will also be formed for utilisation of the fund.

Sheikh Hasina also said, "Measures have to be there so that no-one can stop the trustee board and fund with the change of government."

According to Bangladesh Economic Review, the number of students in all types of general schools till 2008 was 68.25 lakh and in general colleges and universities the number was 13.47 lakh.

The country's present education budget is Tk 18,000 crore.