

Govt mulls free schooling for children up to 13

Says Bobby Hajjaj

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The government plans to make education free and compulsory for children aged between four and 13, as well as extend primary education up to Grade 8 in phases, State Minister for Primary and Mass Education Bobby Hajjaj said yesterday.

He made the remarks at a pre-budget consultation on education titled “Education Budget: Trends and Lessons”, organised by Campaign for Popular Education (Campe) at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka.



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“Children aged 4-5 years will be considered pre-primary, 6-10 for primary, and 10-13 years would take it up to Grade 8. We want to make it compulsory,” Hajjaj said.

The state minister said the government was moving towards professional skill-based education so that students are better prepared for work and future livelihoods.

He also said development of a new primary curriculum centred on learning through play and storytelling was underway. The ministry would move carefully on curriculum changes and seek support from stakeholders, he added.

Hajjaj mentioned existing challenges regarding infrastructural issues in the primary education sector.

He also said financial support would be essential for children from low-income families to continue schooling, as many families would opt to send their children to work instead without cash incentives.

Hajjaj highlighted the government's midday meal programme, now being implemented on a pilot basis in 151 upazilas, and said it would be expanded in phases nationwide within the next year.

Students are being provided different meals on different days following a menu designed to maintain roughly similar nutritional value each day, with support from the World Food Programme and nutrition specialists at Dhaka University, he noted, adding that the government also aims to introduce hot cooked meals in the future.

He, however, said scaling such a programme from a limited number of schools to more than 65,000 nationwide remains a major challenge.

Professor Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed and State Minister for Planning Zonayed Abdur Rahim Saki were also present, while Campe Executive Director Rasheda K Choudhury moderated the event.