ISLAMABAD, July 9:
The Senate on Monday passed a bill to provide free and compulsory education to all children, aged between five and 16 years, in the federal capital.

The bill also calls upon the relevant authorities to ensure that both boys and girls of migrants, including non-Pakistani families, are attended by the education system.

Presented by four senators from different parties, the bill aims to start a national tradition for providing education to all the citizens of the state.

The education sector in Islamabad is still under the domain of the federal government, even though education has been devolved to provinces under the 18th amendment.

Saeeda Iqbal of the PPP, Chaudhry Muhammad Hussain of PML-Q, Najma Hameed of the PML-N and Farah Aqi of the ANP presented the bill in the house.

"Every child, regardless of sex, nationality or race shall have the fundamental right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school," the bill says.

The bill also said no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee, charges and expenses, which are generally considered the main hindrances to acquire education.

The relevant agencies, which are the Islamabad Capital Territory administration and the Capital Development Authority, will be responsible for ensuring that every child gets free education.

Under the bill, it would be the responsibility of the government departments concerned to establish schools in each neighbourhood within three years after the approval of the law.

These departments are also responsible for encouraging enterprises, institutions and other stakeholders of society by offering incentives to establish schools to facilitate free and compulsory education.

However, the duties of parents have also been highlighted in the bill to ensure that the children obtain schooling up to the age of 16 years.

"Any parent who fails to comply with the requirements of the Bill and whose children are not attending school could be fined up to Rs50,000 which may be extended to Rs500 daily as long as the failure to comply with the law continues."

There are a few exceptions for the parents, however: first, if there is no school in the locality and second, if the child is incapable of attending the school due to mental incapacity etc.

An official of the ICT administration said Islamabad, both rural and urban, was among the few places in the country where schools were present within a short distance.

The bill also calls upon private schools to admit 10 per cent of underprivileged students belonging to the neighbourhood in each class.

Any school or person receiving donations, contributions etc., at the time of admission from the students or their parents will be fined Rs50,000 and Rs100,000 for repeating the offence.

No child shall be subjected to corporal punishment or mental harassment, and the students cannot be expelled from the school till the completion of the prescribed education.

The government schools should also establish management committees comprising government officials, teachers and parents.

These committees will be responsible for monitoring the general working of the school and ensuring that the prescribed norms and standards are observed.

The committees would also prepare and recommend the annual development plan of the school and ensure that the education policy of the government is implemented.

The school management committee shall also ensure that every child attends the school and for this purpose it shall take necessary steps.

Besides, the committee will be responsible to issue warnings to the employers who hire a child of school-going age.

"Any employer who continues to employ a child on remuneration or otherwise, despite warning by the committee, shall be liable to a punishment with a fine up to Rs50,000 or six months imprisonment or both," the bill said.